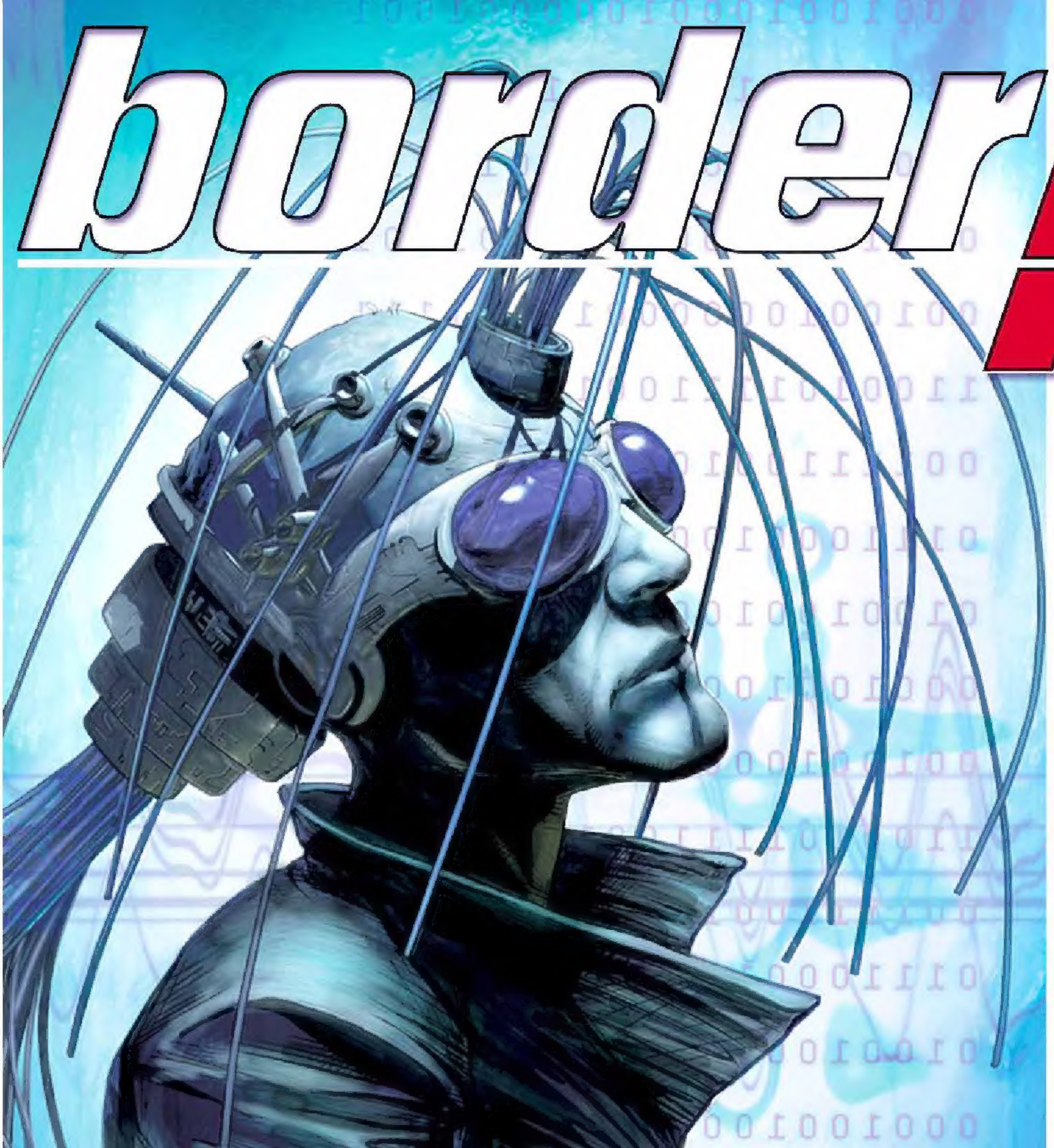

border line

THE Comics Magazine

February #7

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Glenn Dakin

Lots of Brazilians!

Features on:

John Buscema

Spider-Man

Angouleme

Frank Miller

2000AD

Dragonball

Mike Collins

John Charles

Brazilian independents

Dan DeCarlo

Columns · Reviews

News · Views

Small Press

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There are also hyperlinks throughout Borderline enabling you to link directly with stories, websites and points of interest on the internet.

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This issue is respectfully dedicated to John Buscema, Kurt Schaffenberger, Ricard Castells and Glynn McOnie (sleep tight, geezer)

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INDUSTRY STANDARD

Phil Hall talks about losing an old friend...

THERE is a generation of US comic fans out there who will understand the next sentence better than most: "John Buscema was my Jack Kirby!"

We didn't miss out on anything because we had him. He was similar to Kirby in my then young eyes, but there was a dynamic about John's stuff that just blew me away. In fact within a few years I'd forgotten about Jack and Steve and was concentrating on John and Sal (although I have to confess to thinking, as a nine-year-old, that Sal might have been John's wife or sister... Hey, there were John and Marie Severin, so why not?!)

John Buscema might not have become a household comics name until 1966, but he'd been around since the late 1940s. When I look at his artwork I don't see the influences I see in any modern artists. I see similarities to other artists from that era, and I also see what gave John Buscema an advantage over the run-of-the-mill - his sense of drama and pathos. If John Buscema is remembered for nothing else, it should be as the man who developed human expressions in his comics characters (yeah, he probably borrowed heavily from the Europeans even then, but he was different) and introduced Americans to a Michelangelo-esque realism that had been missing from superhero comics until he arrived.

To me, Big John was the quintessential superhero artist. Whatever character he turned his hand to he imbued them with a real sense of being "super" - with one exception, he rarely drew Spider-Man and when he did he made Peter Parker look too ... beefy. Other than that, he could draw superheroes and convey the feeling of raw power, something that seems to require more effort on the part of the current crop of dynamic superhero artists.

It seemed like an odd move, in my eyes, that he should almost turn his back on the area he seemed born to draw and concentrate on an incredibly long run on **Conan the Barbarian**. The bitter irony of his 15-year run on that title is that people will always remember it for Barry Windsor-Smith's 21 issues and not John Buscema's 200-odd issues.

Buscema was also incredibly adaptable and seemed to be able to continue to produce vibrant work on and on, even as that of his contemporaries often started to look flat or anachronistic. This was never better illustrated than when John returned to draw **The Avengers** in the mid-1980s. The 40-odd issue run carved out by him and writer Roger Stern is regarded as one of many high points in that comic's life and it proved that Buscema still had what it took to compete with the young upstarts who were infiltrating the industry.

There was always a sense of never being let down by a John Buscema-drawn comic. If Big John was on board then it would be enjoyable at worst and, at best, far more than that.

Several months ago, when the news broke that John had cancer, I wanted to put together a **Borderline** living tribute special - thinking how it's terrible that a loved one can slip out of our grasp, sometimes without them knowing how much they meant to the people they'd touched. But, the sad truth is that people don't really like to be reminded of their mortality - and who can blame them? I still wish I'd done it. There have been far too many deaths of comicbook greats in the last couple of years and another sad truth is that it will continue until we're looking at a different generation of greats staring the Grim Reaper in the eyes. For me personally, the death of John Buscema has been the hardest one so far because he's been on the same trip as me since day one!

Since writing this tribute to John Buscema, editor Phil Hall, his wife and her family suffered their own tragic loss.

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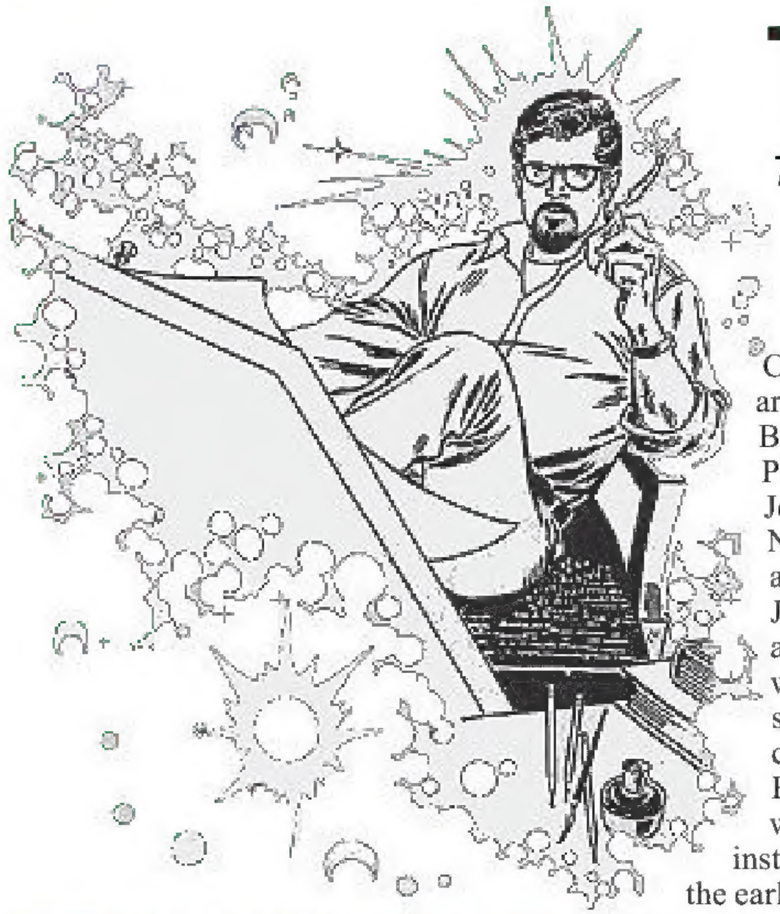
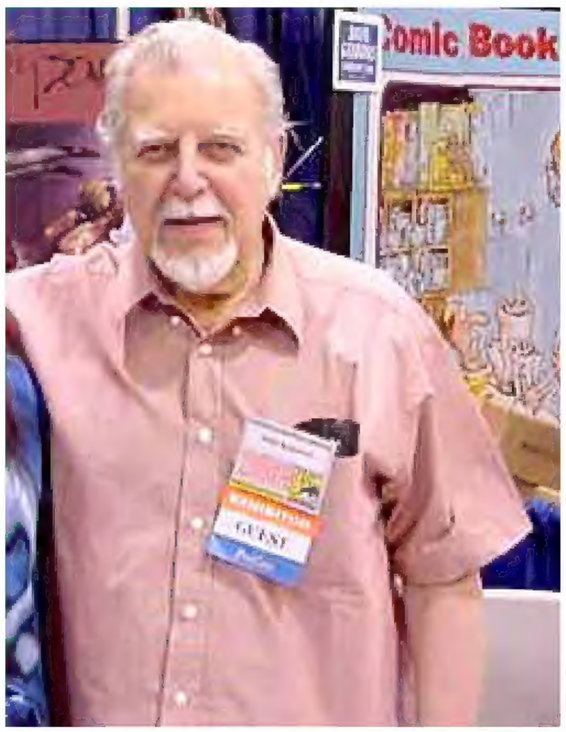


THE COMICBOOK MICHELANGELO?

The US comics industry is rocked by the death of yet another one of its Silver Age architects

John Buscema (1927-2002)

COMICBOOK artist John Buscema, of Port Jefferson, NY, passed away on January 10, after a battle with stomach cancer. Buscema was instrumental in the early visual styling of Marvel Comics. During his time at Marvel, Buscema's illustrations graced the pages of virtually every title, most notably **Fantastic Four**, **The Avengers**, **Silver Surfer**, and **Conan the Barbarian**.



Born in New York City on December 11, 1927, Buscema studied at the High School for Music and Art and then the Pratt Institute before breaking into comicbook illustration in 1948 with the Marvel/Timely/Atlas group. He spent two years with the embryonic Marvel Comics before moving to other publishers including the Orbit group (which produced romance and western comic strips), and Charlton before settling down with Western (Gold Key) where he concentrated on drawing movie adaptations and the ongoing **Roy Rogers** book.

Between 1958 and 1966, Buscema mostly worked for ACG (American Comics Group) and admitted himself that this was a particularly low point in his career. He supplemented his income with work in the advertising art field - as many artists of the time did. However, in 1966 he got a call from Stan Lee, the charismatic and flamboyant writer/Editor-in-Chief of Marvel Comics, asking him if he wanted to join "the Bullpen", Lee's affectionate name for the sixties Marvel studio set up.

Along with the late Jack Kirby, John Romita Sr, Steve Ditko, and John's younger brother Sal, Buscema became a mainstay of Marvel's burgeoning dominance in the comics scene of the late 1960s. The list of comics characters he has drawn is a who's who of American pop art history. In fact the only character that Buscema's name was not

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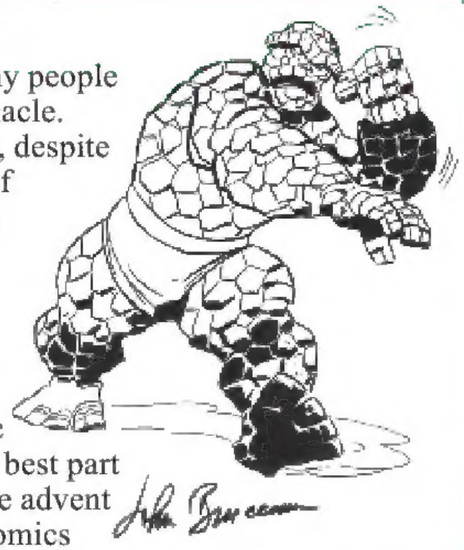
synonymous with at Marvel was Spider-Man (although he did provide layouts and breakdowns on the comic a number of times).

While his name might not mean a lot to people not familiar with the comics industry, there is a good chance that people have seen Buscema's art more often than that of any other superhero comicbook artist. He was the artist on the short-lived **Silver Surfer** comic of the late 1960s - a series which is still constantly raided for poster designs and even manages to creep into a number of Quentin Tarantino movies. **The Silver Surfer**, specifically his 17 issues from 1967-1969, has achieved a massive cult status over the years and it is fitting that Buscema should be remembered for a series that many people believe was his pinnacle.



During the 1970s, despite helming a number of Marvel's top selling comics, Buscema established a niche for himself in the ongoing adventures of **Conan the Barbarian**, a comic he stayed on for the best part of 15 years. With the advent of a new breed of comics creators in the late 1980s, Buscema appeared to take a backseat, and during the 1990s his work was seen less and less. He retired, very unobtrusively, in 1996.

Ironically, in his long and prestigious career the artist who applied for a staff position at DC Comics (home of Superman, a character many believe Buscema was born to draw), only actually had his first work published by the TimeWarner-owned company in 1998 (a Batman story); and at the end of his life he was working with his old collaborator Stan Lee on a comic entitled **Just Imagine Stan Lee and John Buscema creating Superman**.

Buscema is survived by his wife, Dolores, son, John Jr., his daughter, Dianne, and four grandchildren.

Young Romance
MARVEL DIGEST SERIES No 6
FORGET HIM GIRL! HE'S A STAR! YOU HAVEN'T A CHANCE!
YOUR HEART WON'T LET YOU FORGET "I DARED TO DREAM THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM!"

DON'T GET YOUR WHISKERS IN AN UPROAR, PANTHER!
YOU'D THINK YOU NEVER SAW A ROOMFUL OF AVENGERS BEFORE!
HE NEVER WAS, BOW-SLINGER... AT LEAST, NOT THIS BIG A ROOMFUL!
SAY... THAT'S RIGHT, ISN'T IT?
T'CHALLA NEVER EVEN MET THOR AND IRON MAN!
WELL? NO WORD FOR ME, OLD FRIEND?
CAP... AND ALL THE OTHERS OF THE MIGHTY AVENGERS!
AND WITH THEM... THE VISION!

A selection of Buscema: Previous page – self portrait (top, left), photo from San Diego 2001 (bottom), classic Vision cover (main). This page – Surfer vs Thor rough pencils, John meets Joe (Sinnott) and Stan Lee at San Diego 2001, The Thing, a rare romance comic and a classic Avengers line-up.

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Spider-Man is Amazing again

JMS and JRJR double sales, propelling Amazing Spider-Man past the 100,000 mark for the first time in years. Report by Mike Sivier...

MARVEL'S flagship title, **The Amazing Spider-Man**, has leapt back to the top of the comics charts after a new creative team conquered the hero's greatest enemy - his own fans' apathy.

At the beginning of 2001, readers were fleeing Spidey's friendly neighbourhood in droves, put off by convoluted and lacklustre scripts.

Then Marvel Editor-in-Chief Joe Quesada appointed a new creative team: *Babylon 5* creator J Michael Straczynski took over as writer, while series stalwart John Romita Jr stayed on as penciller.

For comic fans, it was a match made in heaven and sales have doubled since May 2001, shooting past 100,000 for issue #36 - the historic and controversial World Trade Centre story - and staying there.

Readers can expect Marvel to scream its success from the rooftops for the foreseeable future. Quesada had this to say: "The team of JMS and JR JR have proven to be more than cool initials - they've proven to be the best storytelling team in comics today.

"I have been calling Johnny Romita Jr 'The World's Greatest Comic Artist' since the day I started at Marvel, over three years ago. But now, teamed with Joe, the two are reaching unequalled heights. What Joe and John have done is nothing short of miraculous in such a short period of time, and I'm as proud as can be to have them both in the Marvel family."

Series editor Axel Alonso agreed: "I'm thrilled by the numbers of course, but I think that JMS and JRJR are just beginning to build the audience for **Amazing Spider-Man**. So far, readers have only seen this team's opening salvo. The best is yet to come."

But what have they done?

Straczynski's brief for the character seems clear from the outset. The first page of his first issue (#30) clears the decks, telling the reader everything he or she needs to know: Spidey's wife has left and he has moved into a new apartment.

From there, it's "away and up and out" to a double-page image - a defining one for Spider-Man as he swings above the glowing lights of New York, his home.

By the end of the issue he has met a mysterious new ally, Ezekiel, and the reader has been introduced to the villain of the story - Morlun. Two entirely new characters, taking the series in an entirely new direction.

The editorial team have made it clear that this is Straczynski's policy for his tenure on **Amazing**. In a response to a letters-page query, Assistant Editor John Miesegaes said: "JMS has no plans to dig up old villains in this title. Back when we first spoke about his goals for the series, he reminded me of the days when **Amazing Spider-Man** simply churned out new and fascinating villains - from the Green Goblin to the Lizard to

The Amazing Spider-Man: the hype and the reality

IT seems strange to think that sales of more than 100,000 are a matter to brag about, when just a little over a decade ago, Marvel's adjectiveless Spider-Man sold in excess of a million.

Doubling sales within a year is a great achievement, but 100,000 for a mass-market comic is less-than-impressive.

However, they're *all* less-than-impressive figures at the moment. The US comics industry is just beginning to pull itself out of a recession that looked more like a suicidal nose-dive in terms of sales.

Some have suggested that Amazing should be faring far better, considering that a new movie featuring the wall-crawling hero will be released in May, and has been offering more cross-media publicity for the character than he has had for many years.

When Spider-Man was released in 1991, Marvel couldn't swing a film deal to save its corporate life. This is unsurprising, as the title was both written and drawn by Todd McFarlane, whose lack of scripting experience screams from every page and makes reading the story seem like torture.

Sales on Spider-Man were driven by hype, rather than content. The story was drivel but the art was pretty - if you liked McFarlane's cartooning.

But even current artist John Romita Jr.'s previous run, scripted by Roger Stern, managed better sales than the current figure, consistently shifting something like a quarter of a million copies in the mid-1980s.

One reason for the current celebration could be that it is an artistic success, as well as one in terms of sales. J Michael Straczynski's scripts have been setting comics fans' imaginations

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Kraven to the Kingpin. JMS wants to introduce you to his own villains."

To balance this out, in the very next issue JMS returns Peter Parker, Spidey's alter ego, to his former school, Midtown High - the place he first gained his powers. By the end of the episode, Peter has installed himself as the new science teacher.

So JMS is moving Spider-Man into the future while anchoring him firmly to his past. It's a sharp manoeuvre as it also provides a chance to smear some street grit across the pages of a series that has always striven to maintain its connection with the streets of New York.

The rest of the first story arc - ambiguously entitled *Coming Home* - follows a course one might expect from a TV scriptwriter: It's like a film. Each episode turns the tension up a notch, building to an explosive climax in issue #35.

This is not a new policy. It worked for Kevin Smith when **Daredevil** was relaunched, and it works for JMS here - despite a slightly clichéd resolution to the final battle.

The following issue was the World Trade Centre special. Debate is still taking place over whether this was a masterpiece or a mistake, but it left readers to wait in suspense for an extra month after the cliffhanger ending to *Coming Home*.

If all the above makes it seem like sole responsibility for Spidey's revival should rest with JMS - it doesn't. Credit for **Amazing**'s success rests equally with veteran series penciller John Romita Jr.

JRJR is the son of 1960s **Amazing** penciller John Romita, and pencilled a fan-favourite run of the title himself in the early 1980s for scripter Roger Stern. He returned to the title recently and - as you can see from the images on this page - he is once again setting Spidey's world on fire.

The Amazing Spider-Man is available from specialist comic shops. A trade paperback collection of *Coming Home* is due to appear at the same outlets in the very near future. BL

on fire, and nobody draws Spidey as well as JRJR - even though his current style may be less accessible to readers than in the 1980s.

What effect has the movie hype had on these figures? Little, one suspects. If sales of Amazing are going to increase because of the film, they'll do so around the time of its release - and then only if the film features a prominent announcement pointing out that a comicbook about the character is available every month.

No, The Amazing Spider-Man is selling to comics fans - probably habitual fans - who are most likely already buying a handful of other Marvel titles.

Marvel Editor-in-Chief Joe Quesada, and President Bill Jemas have been making a lot of noise about reaching out to new audiences, and the movie promo buzz about Spidey should be a great cash-in point for them.

So far, they seem to have fumbled it - concentrating on dealing in the closed world of fandom.

They have contracted Spider-Man creator Stan Lee to write the movie adaptation, a move pitched squarely at the fans. If they wanted the rest of the world to sit up and pay attention, why not ask writers like Joss Whedon (creator of TV's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*) or Kevin Smith (writer/director of *Clerks*, *Mallrats*, *Chasing Amy*, *Dogma* and *Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back*, and scripter of Daredevil and Green Arrow) - or even current Spidey scripter Straczynski? All of these are real celebrity names, rather than merely heroes to comics fans.

Every issue of the JMS/JRJR run (which started with Amazing issue 30) has sold out, we are told. But this is because Marvel is, in essence, printing on demand.

Doubling the series' sales figures is a start. But Marvel will have to do a lot more before the real world pays attention.

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Toenail Clippings - Irish Comics Flying to Angoulême

BIG IF Publications are off to the great Euro-comics festival, Angoulême, where they've been nominated for the Alph' Art Award for Best Small Press Comic. Despite the existence of small press comics including Dope Fiends, Surge, Leaflit and The Yellow Press Group, Eire has never had anything that could be described as close to a comics industry. Toenail Clippings hopes to change that. Andrew Luke finds out why.

"SOMETIMES I feel isolated from the others 'cos they don't see the world of comics out there so they can't hope to aim for it, you know? But that distance is what helps make our book a bit different, we don't always need a comicbook frame of reference. I think that the visit to Angoulême will open everyone's eyes to this." – Brendan Byrne

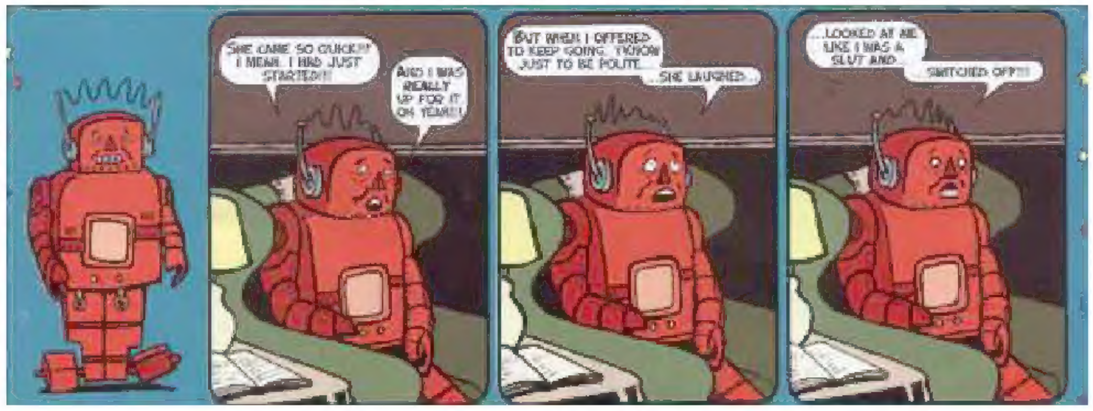
The co-founders of Big If Publications, Brendan Byrne and Des McElroy, met while working for Graphic Color Works in the summer of 97, under the tutelage of Steve Oliff. This mainly involved computer colour work for Marvel and DC. "And it was shit - like all jobs. At first it was kinda cool, it wasn't flipping burgers but the pay was the same", tells Byrne, whose role is that of group spokesman. "That's *Brendan Byrne* , under-lined with bold letters and stars", he tells me, unleashing a roaring chortle. "I mean, I learned a lot about the process of using computers to colour and that has been extremely useful, but it was colour by numbers and the numbers might as well have been all the same!"

Brendan left at the beginning of 1998 (Des, the following year); "It coincided with a period of my life when I was getting out of a serious depression caused by a long term relationship ending (becoming the main theme in my work) and I spent a lot of the time in introspective nosedive. We had sketchbooks with cartoons in them so somehow I suggested photocopying them in a comic, I had been working on an idea and had some covers sketches done. Also, I had the name Toenail Clippings. Yes, I am responsible!"

Byrne and McElroy launched it as a photocopied zine in the summer of '98; it went well, which encouraged them to do it bigger and better. Enlisting the aid of art college chums Steven Weekes, Gavin Beattie , Paul Jennings and Gabriel Reyes - a Mexican-born resident of Paris – they formed the core group. However, the project was turned down for an Arts Council Grant.

"I suppose their response was to be expected and reflected our half-hearted application", says Brendan. "I kinda think everyone expected them to realise the potential of what we were trying to do and support us. Unfortunately it doesn't work like that. Firstly, your project has to lie within certain pre-determined headings to receive grant support. Simply...ours didn't. We were a commercial magazine, not an arts based publication, despite our all holding degrees in Fine Art and all practising what we felt was art. But it doesn't matter, we will go back to them when we are more stable and our structure reflects our aims more."

Happily, a start up grant for £2,000 was received elsewhere, allowing Byrne and Weekes to attend business and marketing courses and providing a start-up bank balance. The aid of bank loans meant that in November 2000 the first printed issue was launched, and the fourth issue was released in mid January 2002. The result is assiduous care and application to specifics, with a smooth cover by Frenchmen Tanitoc and Jean-Jacques Rouger. The polish pervades the contents, proudly boasting variety. Altered photographic images sit alongside the black and white approaches, gradations


SHE CAME SO QUICK!!! I MEAN, I HAD JUST STARTED!!!
AND I WAS REALLY UP FOR IT OH YEAH!!!
BUT WHEN I OFFERED TO KEEP GOING, THINK JUST TO BE POLITE...
...SHE LAUGHED...
...LOOKED AT ME LIKE I WAS A SLUT AND...
SWITCHED OFF!!!

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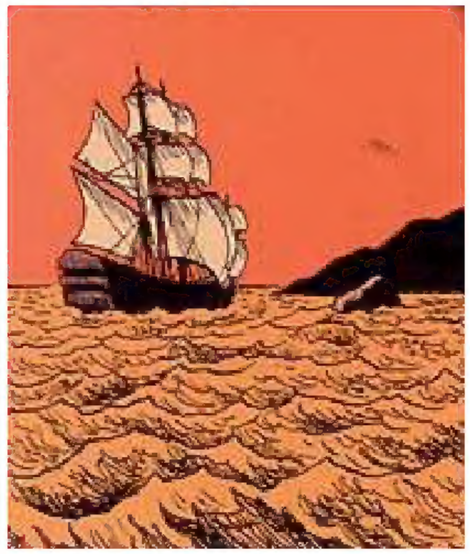
of india ink, the woodcut look, wallpaper experiments and when called for, computer colours. Commentator Duncan Russell has described the Toenail Clippings common unifier as a "social subculture themology". Beside the lead strip, *Dragonface loves Devildoll*, a tale of Irish cider-swilling rockers, there are pieces about radical politicians, skateboarders, lonely hearts, gangsters and soap opera viewers alongside day-to-day autobiography.

I ask Brendan about their intentions. Is this "covering all bases" a calculated move? ... **B L**

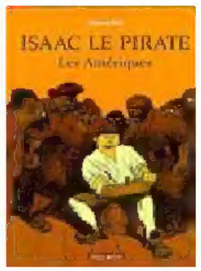
Monster Truck Bonanza

Gabriel Reyes 2001
Roland! Roland! The boss wants to see you!
You must hurry! He said it was urgent!
I wonder what he wants? Surely he is going to fire me! I just haven't been the best worker lately!
Mr. Roland!
Yes Mr. Simons! I know I haven't been doing my best lately!
What on earth are you talking about, Mr. Roland?
I need to talk to you about a very important matter. There is no time to waste. There is a very important client coming today. I need you to take care of him personally.
Yes, Mr. Roland! And now go to the main lobby. He is waiting for you!
Yes, Mr. Simons!
I wonder who could this be? Why did Mr Simons pick me out of all the bell boys in the hotel?
That is the guest, Mr. Roland please take care of his luggage.
Right away!
And remember: Under no circumstance should this guest lift heavy objects. You must lift them for him.

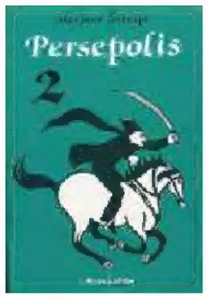
Angoulême 2002 - The Alph'Art Awards



THIS year's principal Alph'Art Awards, announced at the Angoulême Festival, France on January 24, appear to display a distinct preference on the part of the jury for young creators of bandes dessinées, including three non-Europeans and several members of L'Association. Only one of the major prizes was awarded to a veteran French artist.



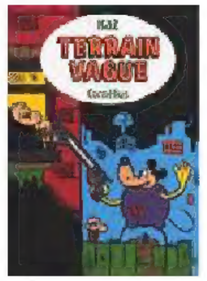
The Best Album prize was awarded to Christophe Blain for Isaac le pirate (Éditions Dargaud), a story of Isaac Sofer, a painter coerced into joining a band of pirates on an Atlantic crossing.



Producing comics since 1994, Blain has collaborated with such other well known "new" artists as Joann Sfar, David B. and Lewis Trondheim.

The Iranian authoress Marjane Satrapi won the prize for Best Scenario for the second volume of her series Persepolis (L'Association), described in some detail in the *World Comics* column in Borderline #4. The first volume of the series won the Alph'Art for Best First Album in 2001, making this an impressive double achievement.

The award for Best Dialogue went to the American artist Kaz for the album Terrain Vague (Éditions Cornélius). Kaz was a frequent contributor to Art Spiegelman's Raw Magazine in the 1980s; since 1993 his strip series Underworld has been syndicated in The New York Press and numerous other magazines.



Best First Album is Matthieu Blanchin's Le Val des Ânes (Éditions Ego); in fact, Blanchin's first album was Monsieur Bonhomme, published in 1991, after which he became a member of L'Association, who originally published Le Val des Ânes! Blanchin is also well known as an illustrator of classic novels.

Breaking the domination of the Alph'Arts by the new wave, veteran artist Jacques Tardi gained the award for Best Art, given for his adaptation of Jean Vautrin's novel Le Cri du peuple (Éditions Casterman). This album has been widely acclaimed as marking Tardi's return to the topography and history of Paris, a subject to which he staked his own, unique claim with the *Adèle Blanc-Sec* series.

The Critics' Award went to American artist Howard Cruse for Un Monde de différence (Éditions Vertige), the French translation of his 1995 graphic novel Stuck Rubber Baby (Paradox Press/DC/Harper Collins). Cruse's book, concerning a young white Southern American's coming to terms with his sexuality and with the racism of the society in which he lives, has received wide critical acclaim in the USA.

[At time of writing it is unknown how the Irish magazine Toenail Clippings, described in this issue of Borderline and nominated for a small press prize at Angoulême, fared.]

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SUPERMAN'S GIRL FRIEND'S ARTIST DIES

ONE of DC's mainstay artists during the 1960s and 1970s, Kurt Schaffenberger, passed away on January 24 at the age of 81.

Like so many other veteran American comicbook artists, Kurt Schaffenberger entered the industry when it was in its early phase of high-speed mass production, working in the Binder shop around 1941-1942. He worked for many companies during the 1940s, but primarily for Fawcett, where his clean-lined and rather cartoony drawing was particularly suited to the style set by C.C. Beck for Captain Marvel.

During the late 1940s and early 1950s Fawcett was his main venue, taking his work via the Beck/Costanza shop; he also did some work for EC and Gilberton. After Fawcett finally closed shop in 1953 he eventually found a new niche at ACG while also turning out some stories for Atlas. At the end of the 1950s he finally gravitated towards National (DC) where he worked primarily under Mort Weisinger's editorship, while still producing stories for ACG under the pseudonym "Lou Wahl".

In 1967 a number of DC's freelance writers attempted to form a union: Schaffenberger, allegedly annoyed at having been transferred from drawing Lois Lane to the *Supergirl* series in Adventure Comics, was the only artist to support the attempt. Consequently he received no more assignments from DC for a few years, during which he worked on commercial and advertising projects and drew a handful of romance stories for Marvel Comics.

During the early 1970s he returned

SUPERMAN'S GIRL FRIEND
LOIS LANE
REAL-NOT IMAGINARY!
SEE WHAT HAPPENS WHEN LOIS TIME-TRAVELS TO KRYPTON BEFORE IT EXPLODED... AND SEE LOIS COURT JOR-EL... WHO WILL SOMEDAY BECOME THE FATHER OF... SUPERMAN!
LOIS: YOU THIEF! HOW DARE YOU TRY TO STEAL JOR-EL? HE'S MY BOY-FRIEND!
WHAT ROTTEN LUCK! ON EARTH LANA LANG IS MY RIVAL FOR SUPERMAN! HERE ON KRYPTON, LARA IS BATTLING ME FOR JOR-EL!
SLAP!
Extra! SUPERMAN and BATMAN'S Force

to DC, where for the rest of the decade he drew virtually every one of their characters, notably the revived Captain Marvel. By the 1980s, though, it seemed that editors regarded his pencilling style as old fashioned and his workload diminished, although he continue to work as an inker, notably over Curt Swan's Superman pencils. By the 1990s he had gone into retirement, emerging only occasionally to work on special projects.

Despite the number and range of his assignments, many fans of US comics will remember Kurt Schaffenberger as the definitive Lois Lane artist of the 1960s. His art for those comics was full of rich, sensuous linework, unobtrusive but finely wrought detail and humorous depiction which could be both warm and sly, fitting the often wacky Weisinger-edited scripts magnificently.

RICARD CASTELLS: A SPANISH MASTER

THE Spanish illustrator and comics artist Ricard Castells died in January 2002.

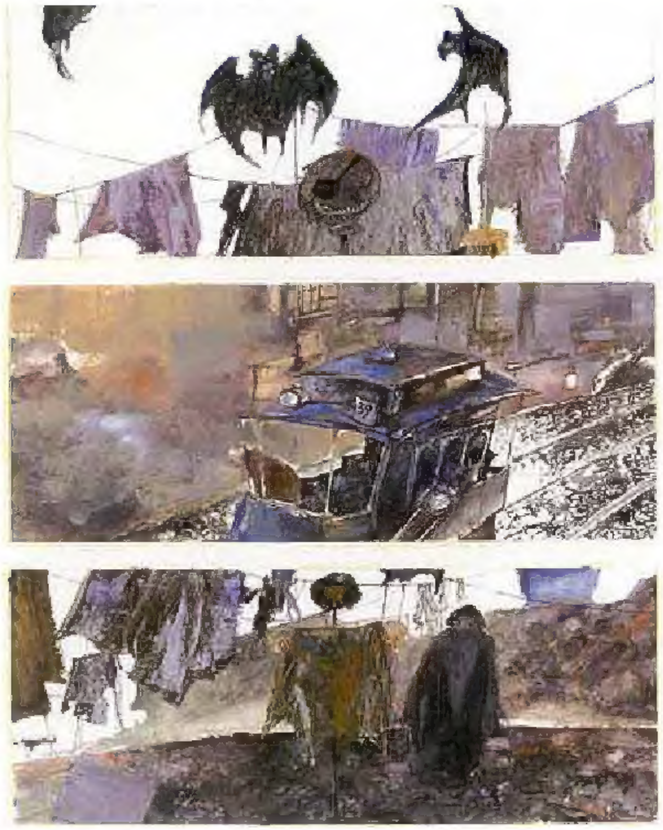
Born in Barcelona in 1955, he entered the comics field through participation in the fanzine *Zero*, which was also a venue for the widely translated artist Miguelanxo Prado. His professional debut was in the horror title **Macabro**, also notable for featuring Esteban Maroto's adaptation of **Frankenstein**, in 1974.

Thereafter, he was published in numerous comic magazines, but also forged a thriving career as a producer of painted book illustrations. He was somewhat less well known as a comics artist until his participation, together with other artists, in writer Felipe Hernández Cava's 1992 series *Aves de Prensa* in the magazine **Injuve**.

In 1998, the publication of **La Expiación**, the third volume of Cava's trilogy **Lope de Aguirre** (Edicions de Ponent) brought Castells to the attention of comics savants throughout Europe, generating critical assessment and widespread praise for his use of colour. **La Expiación** was awarded the prize for Best New Spanish Album of 1998 at the Saló Internacional del Cómic de Barcelona, and was promptly translated and published in French by Freon.

Subsequently, he published a number of works through Ediciones Sinsentido, notably **Poco**, a remarkable vampire story.

As Belgian writer Jan Baetens has noted, Castells was part of a modern movement in comics, which combined expressionist, often painterly techniques and influences with a profound understanding of the comics tradition. Others with whom he might be ranked include Lorenzo Mattotti and Bill Sienkiewicz. Baetens' French language article on Castells can be found at the Image and Narrative website: *http://millennium.arts.kuleuven.ac.be/narrative/index_main.cfm*



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THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING FRANK (a sequel)

The Dark Knight Strikes Again, by Frank Miller and Lynn Varley, could be the most important American comicbook of the year. Mike Sivier examines the career of writer/artist Frank Miller and speculates on his motives for returning to the Batman.

LISTEN, don't you kids try to talk to *me* about Frank Miller! I've been reading his bloody comics for the past 23 years, and *trust me*, I've heard it all before. I was there back in 1979 when he took over the art reins on **Daredevil** and started his grand experiment to revolutionize the way American kids looked at comicbook artwork. I *have* a copy of **Daredevil #158**!

I was there more than a year later when Miller took over the writing of **Daredevil**, making it the only Marvel title in some years to have a single individual at the helm rather than the usual artist/writer collaboration.

I knew about those earlier pioneers, of course - even at the tender age of 12. I had heard about Jim Steranko, who had filled the pages of **Nick Fury, Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D.** with dizzying exploded layouts where time could slow down to a crawl by means of breaking an action down into lots of tiny frames, or where the trajectory of a character's leap could be splintered into a sequence of flowing kinetic images.

I had read Jim Starlin's ingeniously paranoid **Warlock**, reprinted in the British **Star Wars Weekly** when I was nine - and if you want your brain warped off the straight and narrow, then reading **Warlock** at the age of nine'll work just dandy. Even then I knew I was looking at yesterday's storytelling.

All those strips had fallen beneath the scythe of plummeting sales and their creators had wandered off to less high-profile projects, or even out of comics altogether. Yesterday's men.

Frank Miller was new. He was happening *now*. And he still is.

That, in itself is a major point in his favour. When Miller first arrived on the scene, the smart money had it that he'd be gone within a couple of years, off to draw coffee-table extravaganzas full of moody barbarians with naked women surgically grafted to their legs, and lugging around an ego the size of Wembley.

Hey, it could have happened. Look at Simon Bisley.

But it didn't. You live and learn, lads and lasses. You live and learn.

So Frank turned up in **Daredevil #158**, after a stint at Gold Key and a few fill-in issues for Marvel. It was a fairly conventional start, but there was definitely something there. Look

at the panel where Death-Stalker leaps through the tombstone.

Over the following 10 issues, a number of interesting artistic influences began to work their way out through the pages of **DD**

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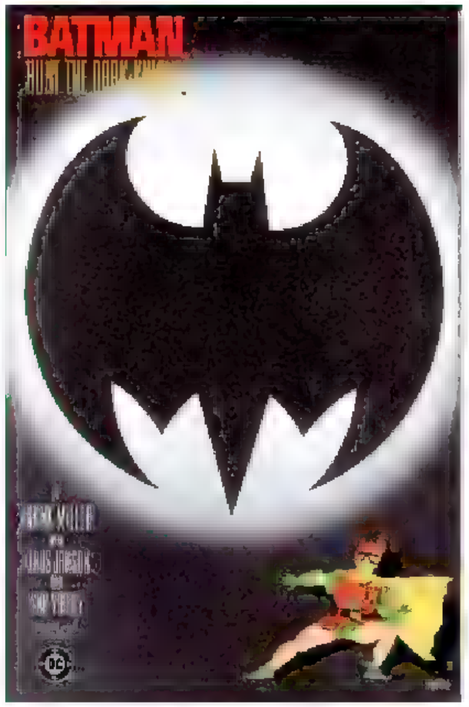
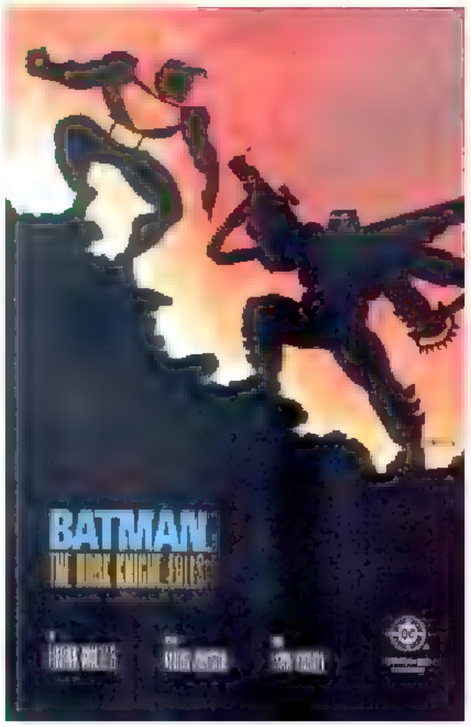


to the discerning eye. Mine wasn't at the time, but I have the benefit of hindsight, and other people's commentaries.

A sequence in **DD #164** where, in a retelling of his origin story,



the hero pursues a terrified racketeer through a subway, bore a striking resemblance to one from Bernie Krigstein's famous EC story *Master Race* (in **Impact #1**).

In the background of panels showing DD racing over the seamier rooftops of New York, partly visible billboards bore the words "The Spirit" – a reference to Will Eisner's habit of incorporating the logo of his **Spirit** strips into an element of his splash page design.

So there was a touch of Eisner, a smidgeon of Krigstein, and increasingly, a generous helping of Frank Miller.

He had already started using symbolism for dramatic effect. During the flashback sequence in which Battlin' Jack Murdock, DD's father, is ensnared by a racketeer known as the Fixer, as the villain holds out the fatal contract for Murdock Sr.'s signature, the boxer's face is encircled by smoke rings from the mobster's cigar, just as he himself has been encircled and outflanked by the mobster's argument - a technique more common to cinema than comics.

Then he started writing the thing.

Miller's approach to characterization has drawn praise from, among others, fellow 1980s comics guru Alan Moore. In a 1983 article, Moore said: "In Miller's work, [the traditional methods of showing characterization in comics] thought balloons and captions have become less and less a part of his characterization technique. All we know of what's going on inside his characters' minds is what we can deduce from a raised eyebrow, a quirk of the lip or a narrowing of the eyes. Just like in real life."

He went on to point out that Miller's own creation, Elektra, had never used thought balloons to expound upon her motives. Thus, much of her characterization is in the reader's mind.

Later works would see Miller re-integrate the caption box into his writing - as a way of expressing his lead characters' thoughts without imposing clumsy thought balloons on the images.

Let's look at his sense of timing. "Flawless and precise," Moore said. "He seems to compose his stories with a musician's sense of rhythm and metre, often interrupting the staccato drama with a sudden oddly-shaped or silent frame that strikes a brief pause, a single downbeat before the story spirals off again in some new direction."

"Sex is used to sell stocks and shares."

There's a strong argument that Miller perfected this technique for the original **Batman: The Dark Knight Returns**. He sweated over the visuals for the story, drawing initial versions and then chopping out anything he deemed unnecessary to the effective telling of the story.

Another effective device was the Frank Miller "scene change", again from **Daredevil**. Using tall panels, running from top to bottom of the page and featuring some aspect of New York's landscape, he set the mood for the scene which followed. This was often coupled with strategically placed captions to draw the reader in, and this relates back to his sense of timing. A larger space between the captions put more time between them; a smaller space, less time.

It should, perhaps, be mentioned that Frank Miller is also largely responsible for the introduction of Japanese comic art tradition to western readers. The Japanese approach comicbook storytelling in different ways from Western artists; they use small, monochrome images to suspend time, they use long silent sequences to build a tension that tends to erupt, finally, in a display of violence, and they also do lots of other things that we don't. Check out the relevant parts of **Understanding Comics** by Scott McCloud if you don't believe me.

Miller brought similar pacing, mood and atmosphere to the **Wolverine** mini-series on which he collaborated with Chris Claremont. The series was a success, and turned Claremont on to Japanese culture, leading to ever more heavily diluted depictions of the Orient and eventually, translated reprints of Japanese classics like **Lone Wolf and Cub**, Miller's own favourite.

Everyone seemed to want to get on the bandwagon - a move that had an ultimately deleterious effect on the Western comics industry, in this writer's opinion.

So Miller played a large part in that. His own interest in Japanese culture led him to produce the six-issue maxi-series **Ronin** for DC Comics. This series, currently available in graphic novel format, placed the spirit of a Ronin - a samurai warrior with no master, from the Middle Ages - in a near-future New York. It proved, among other things, that Miller had adapted the Japanese style seamlessly into his own and also that he badly needed someone else to ink his work. Some of the pages in **Ronin** look very ugly indeed. Perhaps this was the style he wanted, but it sure was ugly.

Re-enter Klaus Janson. Miller's former inker on **Daredevil** - and for my money one of the best in the business - rejoined his former partner for **Batman: The Dark Knight Returns**, which should need no introduction. This apocalyptic tale - surely intended at the time to be the last Batman story - was also an artistic triumph, topping the New York Times bestseller list. All the regular Miller devices were on display - characters speaking through caption boxes rather than thought balloons or speech bubbles; almost cinematic page layouts (remember my comments about timing, and the way Miller brutally edited down his own work to make the strongest, best told story he possibly could), and so on.

But Frank was never one to rest on his laurels, and some new devices reared their heads in **DK**. The media was used to tremendous effect, with TV news reports showing what was going on in the wider world beyond Batman's own shadowy existence and worldview - and the effect he was having on that wider world.

Use of the media led inevitably to politics - and politics to

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corruption. Miller's depiction of a future US President heavily satirizes the incumbent of the day, Ronald Reagan, and his style of government. It was a theme to which the creator would return again and again - in the **Elektra** mini-series for Epic Comics, and in **Give Me Liberty** for Dark Horse, to name just two examples.

Miller returned to Batman for **Year One**, which was serialized in the regular DC **Batman** comic, and to Daredevil with **Born Again**, in which he totally revolutionized the lead character's world and brought back his original girlfriend, Karen Page, as a heroin addict.

Throughout the 80s Miller's storytelling was acquiring increasingly darker undertones, leaning towards an almost film noir feel. Colours were muted, dialogue was jagged, and it can't have been much of a surprise for anyone when he released his own noir comic, **Sin City**.

For this new series, Miller gave his style an overhaul. The images are rendered as chiaroscuro - presented via the shadows cast by characters and objects, rather than as straight line drawings of the objects themselves.

And so to his latest effort, **The Dark Knight Strikes Again**, or **DK2**, as its front cover proudly, and disappointingly, declares.

The back cover blurb states: "After fifteen years, the long wait for the sequel to **The Dark Knight Returns** is over!" Hang on a second! Did anybody *really* expect a sequel to **The Dark Knight Returns**, back in 1986? Apart from the suits at DC, of course?

We move on: "Frank Miller and Lynn Varley - the multi-award-winning team responsible for the original series - have united once again to set an astonishing new standard in comic book entertainment." So no Klaus Janson.

Remember what I said about the art in **Ronin**? That Miller desperately needed a good inker for it? That goes double for **DK2**. The artwork is very ugly indeed and would have been greatly improved by the attentions of a decent inker. Janson would've been favourite because of his previous association with **The Dark Knight Returns**.

Nor is the art helped by the eye-sizzling computer colouring of Lynn Varley, whose previous work had employed more conventional techniques - and won her great praise.

Both of these decisions - for Miller to ink the series himself, and for Varley to use computer colouring - seem to be gross miscalculations. What were they thinking of?

Let's keep moving on. "In the three years that have passed since the Batman apparently died, a brave new world has arisen where peace and harmony reign across the globe. But this 'perfect' society has a deadly flaw, and the salvation of all humanity rests upon the fabled hero as The Dark Knight Strikes Again!"

Brave new world. Peace and harmony. Perfect. Not exactly what we expect from Frank Miller, is it? He's more the man who peels away society's pretty mask to expose the decay beneath.

And on page one, that's exactly what he starts doing - courtesy of an aged Jimmy Olsen, pointing out the truth behind President Rickard's spin-doctored statements. For a world free of crime, read "police state". For a people prosperous beyond the dreams of previous generations, read "well-paid slaves". Meanwhile, sex is used to sell stocks and shares.

And in the background, shadowy page-sized images reveal the presence of the Batman, biding his time; speaking through captions. When Superman comes into the story, he first appears in a similar fashion and it is clear that his captioned comments are meant to engage in dialogue with Batman's, illustrating their different philosophies - Clark working within the system, Bruce treating it with contempt.

But enough of this scene-setting; with the next page we're off to the rescue of Professor Palmer - The Atom. Here, Catgirl - the Dark Knight's former Robin - rescues him from a petri dish. Is this a metaphor? Yes, I believe it is - and it seems a harsh comment on DC's treatment of its heroes.

A later sequence confirms our suspicions about this story. Catgirl and her team of batboys - a former street gang from the original **Dark Knight** series - rescue The Flash from a power station where he has been made to run like a hamster in a wheel to power a third of the USA.

It *is* a metaphor, isn't it?

It's a metaphor for DC's treatment of its own characters - for example, keeping them on the treadmill long after they're exhausted.

Wasn't it shortly after the original **Dark Knight** series that Miller quit DC in a bitter argument over creators' rights? It seems that animosity hasn't died down much in the decade and a half since then. Quite the opposite, in fact.

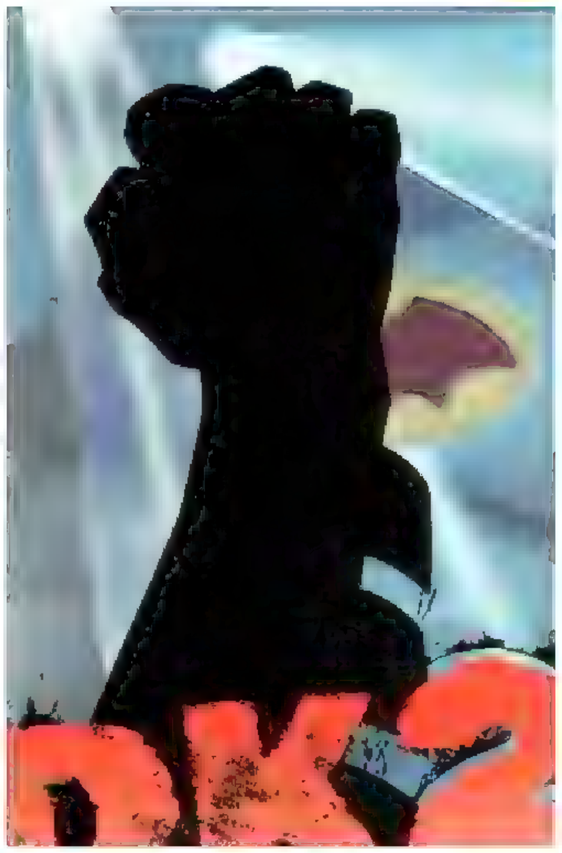
The Dark Knight Strikes Again is the cheekiest piece of work for a major publisher I have ever seen. It seems clear that Miller knew he'd be able to get away with anything, from the moment he signed the contract. He knew **DK2** would be a bestseller and he knew he would be able to get away with an awful lot as a result.

If DC gave him an inch, he's taken the whole nine yards.

Settling scores.

(Parts of this article are based on The Importance of Being Frank, an article by Alan Moore published in 1983. Mr Sivier would like to apologize to Mr Moore for any offence incurred by this action - but it was too good an opportunity to resist).

BL



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2000+ 1280 = 25 YEARS

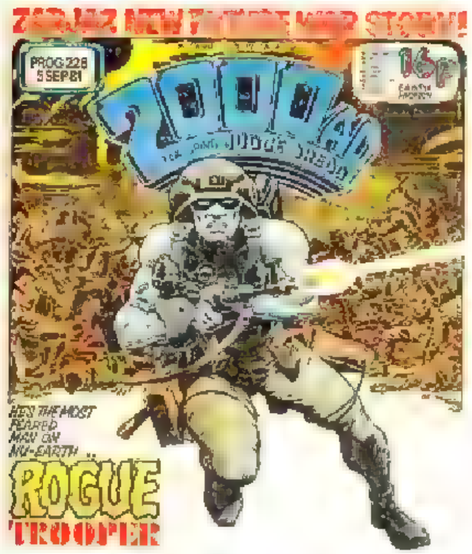
It is difficult to believe that the UK's premier adventure and SF comic is a quarter of a century old, yet it is just about to celebrate that milestone. It has a new publisher and a new vibrancy, but to most devotees, it's just "Tooth"...

"SCIENCE Fiction Comic Paper. I am convinced that there is a hole in the juvenile market which we are not covering."

So began the saga of the "Galaxy's Greatest Comic", 2000AD, in an internal memo to publishers IPC from Kelvin Gosnell in December 1975, reproduced in full in Judge Dredd - The Mega History by Colin M. Jarman and Peter Acton (Lennard Publishing 1995).

With its 1280th issue, (1283rd, if you count the annual specials), 2000AD will mark 25 years of continuous publication, from its beginnings with IPC through to the present day, under the aegis of software developers Rebellion.

Born during a period of tabloid hysteria surrounding the ultraviolence and heightened realism of Action, 2000AD was designed to continue creator Pat Mills' mission to bring British boys' comics kicking and screaming into the 70s, away from the rut they had fallen into, with management and creators still seemingly stuck in the 50s. Mills was a young and hungry firebrand, with a desire to see comics reflecting life as it was on the streets, rather than the unchanging and increasingly out of touch world portrayed in comics of the time. He'd enjoyed success with the launch of Battle Picture Weekly, a war-themed comic, where he came into contact with another important piece of the 2000AD puzzle, Spanish artist Carlos Ezquerra. Another major player in the birth of the comic was already in place; John Wagner, Dredd's creator, and colleague of Mills from the beginnings of their comics careers at DC Thomson, and later as co-writers sharing Mills' garden shed.

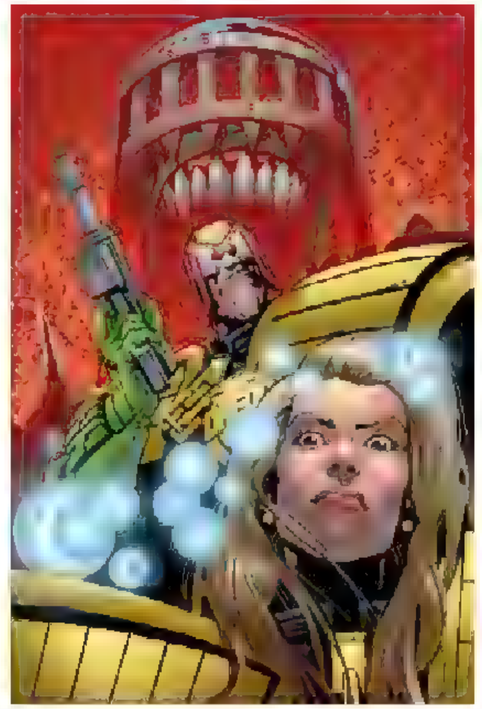


After Battle came Action, which introduced a policy of getting more in touch with current trends by taking inspiration from the silver screen. The protagonists of Action tended to be anti-heroes, modelled on characters like *Dirty Harry*. The stories borrowed heavily from films such as *Rollerball* (Death Game 1999) and *Jaws* (Hook Jaw). With launch sales around 250,000, stabilising at 160,000 later on, Action was considered a great success, and plans for a follow-up were laid.

Initially doubtful about science fiction as a suitable genre, given the depressed state of the field at the time, Mills was convinced by Gosnell to think again after the success of *Death Game 1999* and word of a young film-maker called George Lucas, who was apparently putting a lot of money into a film called *Star Wars*, which would be hitting the cinema circuit in 1976. With the science fiction genre on the cusp of a revival, now was the perfect time to get in position to cash in on it, even if the magazine only lasted as long as the boom did.

IPC Editorial Director John Sanders came up with the title: "In 1976 I gave 2000AD its title which, when I look back, is quite ironic. Normally a successful comic lasts 10 to 12 years, so I joked at the time we should call it 2000AD, because it would be dead and buried by then." Little did he know he would be setting in motion a situation which would cause great consternation and debate among fans and editorial teams as the comic endured and the title and date grew closer to one another.

In the end, current publishers Rebellion settled on retaining the title, rather than renaming it 3000AD or something else. 2000AD is as much a brand as anything. The magazine may be known predominantly as a science fiction title, but it has always featured stories from many other genres, from fantasy and horror to more contemporary material, so although the name may seem rooted in the past here in 2002, it has 25 years of history behind it. And remember the fuss caused by the renaming of *Marathon* bars as *Snickers*, and *Coco Pops* as *Choco Krispies*, or whatever it was?



Borderline spoke to Pat Mills, to gauge his opinion on 2000AD at 25: "Obviously I'm delighted, especially as it's now with a company who for the first time in 2000AD's history actually like the publication. Previously it was hated - and I seriously mean that.

"But I'm sad, too, because it should have been far bigger. The reason that it's not is twofold. First - the idiotic and sometimes vindictive managements who tried so hard to destroy the publication from its creation right through until quite recent times. Secondly - the poor and sometimes destructive editorship, with the notable exceptions of the era when Kevin

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O'Neill and Nick Landau (Titan Books) were de-facto editors and, hopefully, the current era.

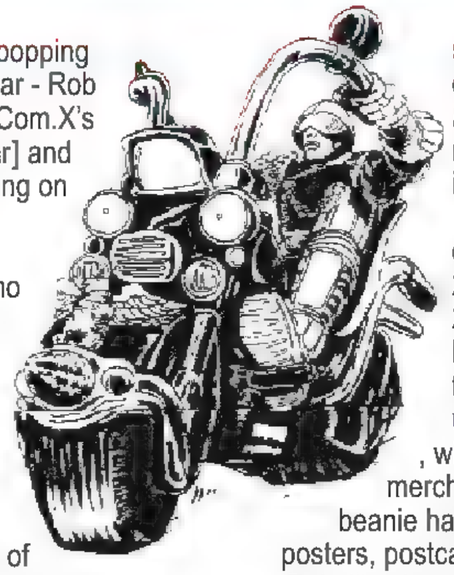
"I feel there's a lot of back-slapping and 'wow! aren't we great' about the anniversary - which is cool. But let's not forget all the readers we lost; all the opportunities to make it bigger that failed; all the talent we lost to other publications; all the great characters not properly exploited or lost; all the exploitation, ripping off, and cheating of contributors; all the pathetic attempts to turn 2000AD into Deadline or *Loaded* or other inappropriate magazines.

"All this considerable shit can be put at the door of various managements, often with the servile obedience of the editors at the time; or is the actual fault of the lacklustre editors themselves.

"Only by making this clear, by bringing it to light, can we be reasonably hopeful it won't happen again."

Responsibility for that task currently lies with the new editorial team of Commissioning Editor Matt Smith and Production Editor Alan Barnes, who've been ensconced in their roles since the beginning of January. Smith was formerly Assistant Editor, under former Tharg Andy Diggle, while Barnes comes hot from the editor's chair at Panini Comics' *Doctor Who Magazine*, and also inherits the Judge Dredd Megazine editor's hat from David Bishop.

Smith told Borderline: "I'm planning to keep 2000AD going in pretty much the same direction as the previous editor, Andy Diggle, was taking it, i.e. getting back that old-school feel with stories such as *Dredd* and *Strontium Dog*, but also mixing in the new stuff. A couple of new names (at least, new to 2000AD) will be popping up in the coming year - Rob Williams, [writer of Com.X's upcoming Cla$$War] and Boo Cook are working on *Asylum*, about half-human, half-alien Asylum Hunters, who track down illegal aliens (in every sense of the word) trying to get to Earth and uncover a nasty secret. Plenty of satire about the treatment of asylum seekers in that one. Then there's *The Red Seas* by The Establishment's Ian Edginton and Steve Yeowell, which is a fantasy-horror pirate series, with plenty of good stuff such as zombie crews and demons."



Asked to predict a few future fan favourite series coming our way, Smith added: "*13*, by Mike Carey and Andy Clarke, should hopefully prove a hit - this tale about street punk Joe discovering his psychic powers and uncovering the secret at the heart of the universe features some gorgeous artwork by the Clarke droid. And the readers seem to be wanting more comedy in 2000AD, so I'll be interested in seeing the reaction to *Bec & Kawl* by Simon Spurrier and Steve Roberts, about a couple of slacker students mixed up in the weirdest stuff..."

With Rebellion at the helm, a great deal of effort is going into making good use of the 2000AD brand, expanding into other media with talk of a new series of novels featuring 2000AD characters, *Judge Dredd* audio adventures and the forthcoming *Dredd Vs Death* computer game, which is planned for release at the same time as the first of two new *Judge Dredd* movies, as reported in previous issues of Borderline.

In order to sate demand for more 2000AD stuff, the 2000AD Future Shop has just opened on the official website, *www.2000adonline.com*, with plenty of 2000AD merchandise for sale, from beanie hats and fleeces, to posters, postcards and keyrings.

Rebellion has unveiled to Borderline another of its plans for getting the 2000AD brand under people's noses. Soon, while wearing their *Dredd* or *Mean Machine* beanie hats, and 2000AD logo fleeces, streetsurfing on their *Judge Dredd* skateboards, juves can annoy the hell out of eldsters with their 2000AD range of mobile phone covers. Designs include *Judge Dredd/ 2000AD*, *Durham Red*, *Judge Death* and *Mega City 1 Punk*, and are for use with the Nokia 8210 (pictured) and

3310.

To celebrate 2000AD's birthday in style, you could do worse than go to the Anniversary Bash at London's Ministry Of Sound on Thursday, February 28, where all manner of things will be happening - from live bands such as Pitchshifter to screenings of cult films, signings and other events involving some of the top talent to have graced the magazine over the years. Full details are available from the 2000AD website.

2000AD Prog 1280 is published on Wednesday, February 27. It features a 12-page *Judge Dredd* story, *Leaving Rowdy*, by series creators John Wagner and Carlos Ezquerra, reflecting on years of dispensing justice and getting older; and a special 10-page story featuring 2000AD characters at the Anniversary Party, with each page written and illustrated by a different creative team.

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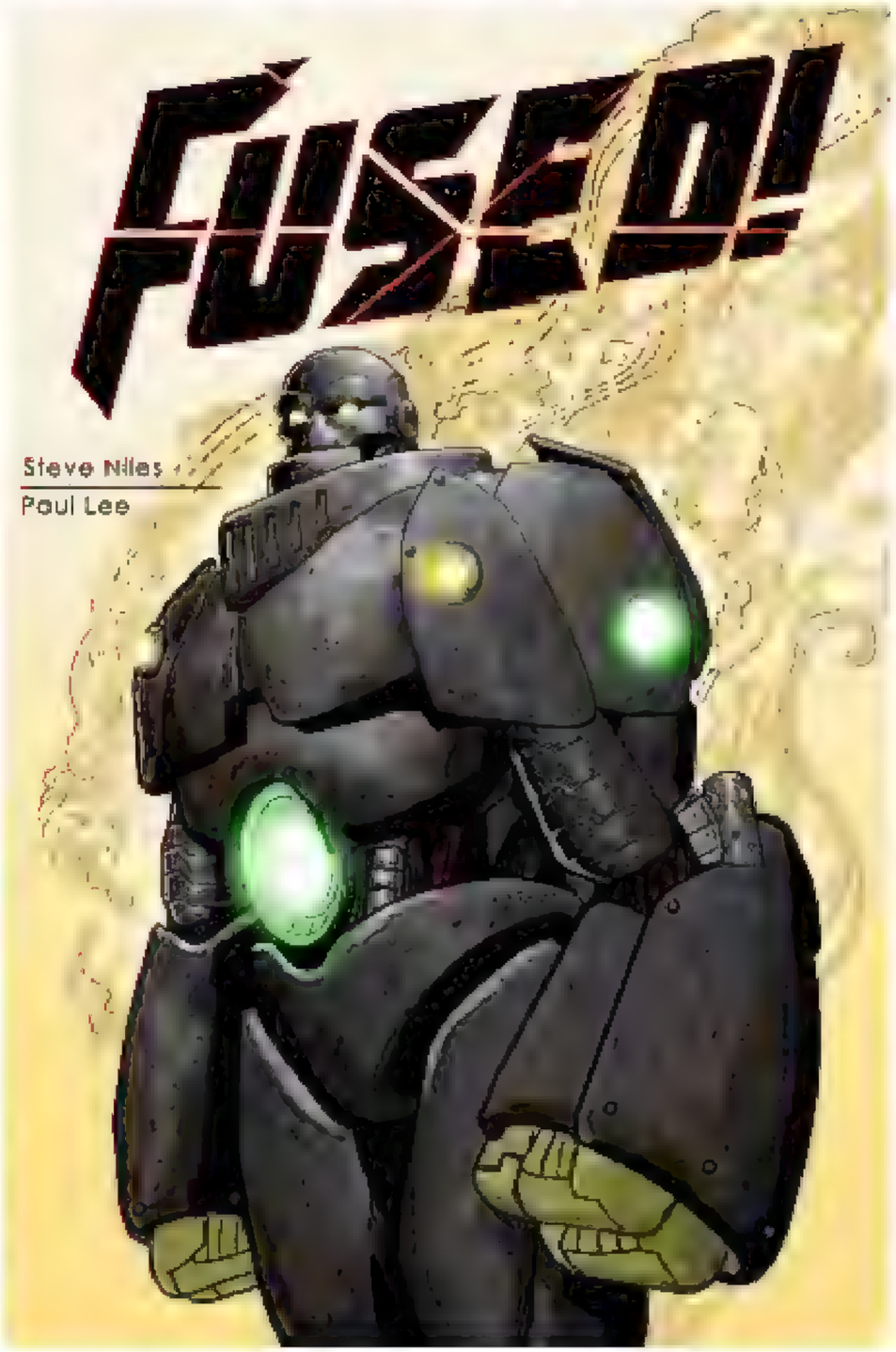
Fused! - an armoured hero for a new millennium



...or just another guy in a metal suit?

THE latest offering from Image Comics is a new take on an old comics concept - the hero with a suit of armour.

Except in this series, the hero doesn't just wear the suit; he is imprisoned inside it.

The company claims Fused! is more than merely a sci-fi/ superhero series. It is, instead, a psychological horror/thriller that places an ordinary man in one of the most terrifying predicaments imaginable.

Imagine that you have become imprisoned within a suit of armor...and that it has fused with your entire nervous system. How will you eat? How can you touch anything or anyone? How will you cope when even the simplest of bodily functions are denied you?

The armoured hero concept has been done before, most notably in Marvel's Iron Man. In the early years of that series, Tony Stark was unable to remove his breastplate because it contained the pacemaker that kept his heart beating.

For a hero trapped inside his suit, one need look no further than the same company's Guardians of the Galaxy, in which astronaut Vance Astro is sealed inside a suit in order to survive years in space.

Image claims Fused! is different, bringing former Spawn: The Dark Ages writer Steve Niles together with painter Paul Lee to bring this unique and unsettling vision to light.

Niles claims: "This isn't just a big guy in a suit. I think our take on this concept is fresh and exciting. This is a real human with a life, a family, and a wife, who has become encased in a virtually inescapable carapace."

The man who becomes fused inside the Cy-Bot is a young scientist/engineer named Mark Haggerty, who has already lost a hand in the service of his country.

Unlike armoured heroes of the past, however, his first instinct is not to save the world, but to ensure his survival and reclaim his life.

"Being trapped inside the suit is the least of his problems," Niles states. "He's stuck in the middle of a grudge war between rival factions in the US government and there are government-sanctioned superheroes hunting him.

"To make matters worse, hes being blamed for his own murder."

The first four-issue story arc, *Canned Heat*,

introduces readers to Haggerty, the Cy-Bot he has become, and the life-altering predicament in which he finds himself.

Fused! is an ongoing, full color Image comic debuting in March 2002. It will be released on a bi-monthly basis. BL

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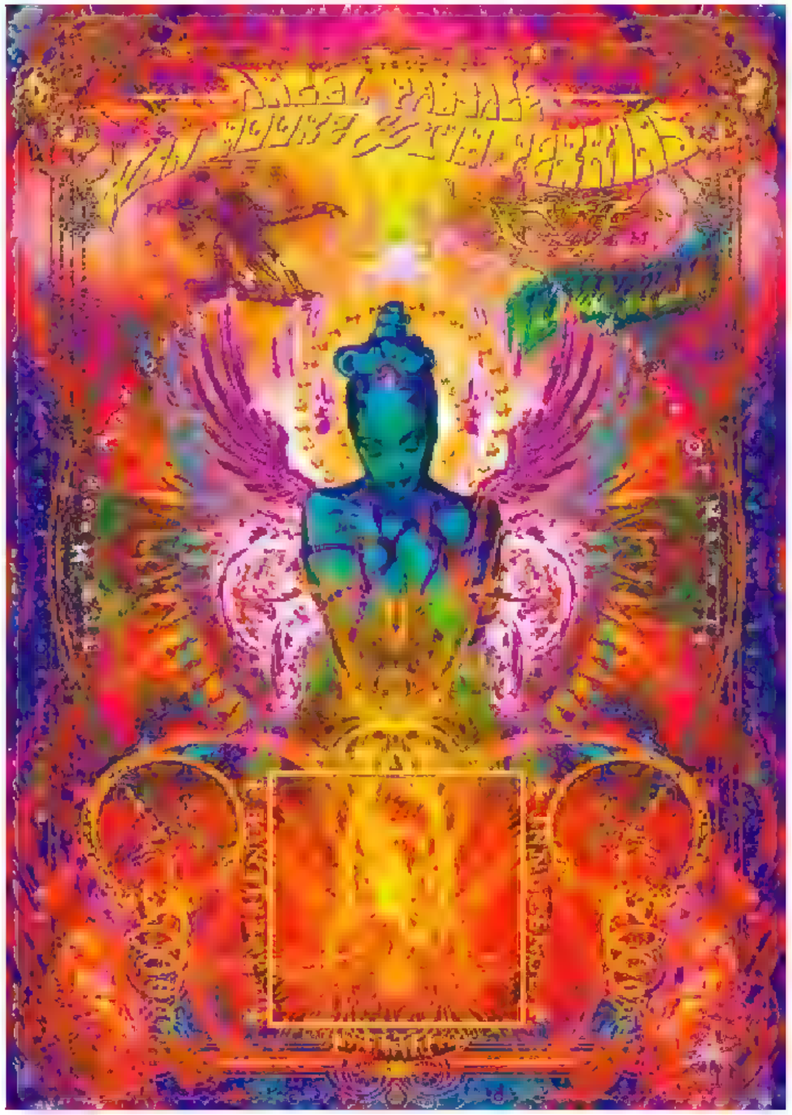


DANCING ON THE HEAD OF A PIN

JANUARY 21, 2002 saw the release of the latest Alan Moore audio extravaganza, *Angel Passage*, capturing a performance by Moore, accompanied by sometime collaborator Tim Perkins, originally given as part of the William Blake retrospective *The Tygers Of Wrath* at London's Purcell Rooms.

An offshoot of an earlier recording, *The Grand Egyptian Moon And Serpent Theatre Of Marvels*, it continues Moore's fascination with psychogeography, and dips into some of the same territory as **From Hell**. Moore continues his collaboration with artist and designer John Coulthart, who provides the lush imagery adorning the CD.

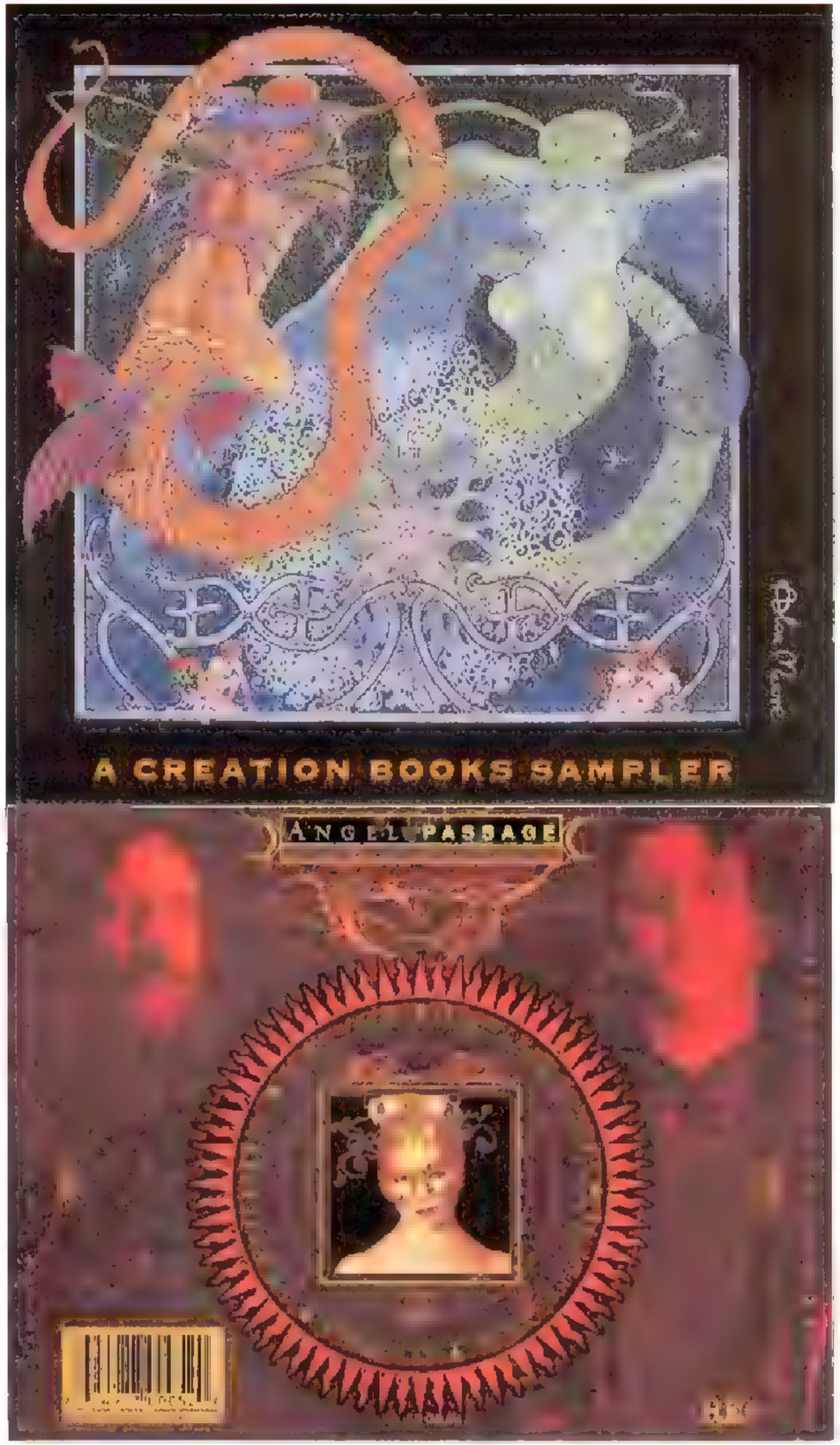
The recording has been reviewed thus, by Nick Hasted in the **Independent On Sunday**: "The night's centrepiece was a truly magical performance by the great comic book writer and visionary, Alan Moore. Nearly seven feet tall, his head shrouded in long black hair and beard, he enters with his sonic accomplice Tim Perkins to grand psychedelic film footage and music, and looks out at us from beneath hooded eyes. Then he reads his own densely evocative, epic description of Blake's life.

"As a white-robed woman enters breathing fire, while behind her the footage turns to Dantean inferno, Blake is followed to his death - only for Moore to fast-forward with the artist's ghost into today's London streets, where he is found existing as a darting, undimmed star. 'It's not enough to study or revere him,' Moore carefully explains, 'only be him'. He, at least, has tried."

You can read another review, by **Borderline**'s Rich Johnston, in his All The Rage column at: *<www.silverbulletcomic books.com/>*

In a previous column, Johnston also offers his views on Moore's previous CD, last year's critically acclaimed *The Highbury Working*, also released through Steve Severin's Re: music label, and is available from: *<www.stevenseverin. com>*

No stranger to the audio medium, Moore's distinctive Northampton tones can be found on CD in **Brought To Light**, an adaptation of his collaboration with Bill Sienkiewicz about the Iran/Contra scandal; **The Birth Caul**, adapted for comics by Eddie Campbell; the aforementioned *The Highbury Working* and *Angel Passage*; and a performance of *Hair Of The Snake That Bit Me* on **Hexentexts**: A Creation Books Sampler, for which he also provided the cover illustration.



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THAT'S GROOVY, BABY!

Canadian publisher hopes to buck the trend

CALGARY comics publishers Frontline Publications would like to introduce readers to Liz, Billy and Cindy - The **Super Dooper Groovy Space Chicks**, in a limited edition issue zero preview in February, followed by issue 1 in March, distributed through Diamond. Taking a leaf out of the popularity of such all-girl trios as *Charlie's Angels*, fun is the order of the day.

As Frontline's editor Alex Hale explained to **Borderline**: "The idea for the Chicks actually came from looking at how silly and sexist our world is. The bottom line is that sexy sells, no matter how stupid or ridiculous it is - see *Baywatch*, *Charlie's Angels*, *VIP*, or any of the other silly TV drek. As if those Chick crimefighters we've seen could survive in a real world!

"So we created a world that would actually support sexy crime fighters, and it's quite a bit different from what we are used to. But definitely a lot of fun. The more we created, the more the Chicks became fun to do."

"Space Chicks has been in pre-production for about the last three years. It is the brainchild of Douglas Vermeeren. Doug started writing comics for a company called Expedition Comics in Calgary. Without fail, Diamond has spotlighted everything that Doug has written, (**The Fourth Age**, **ESP236**, **Jayde - Bounty Hunter Of The Supernatural**, **Chase** and others). Doug's background is very diverse. He has written for magazines and has several film and TV projects in the works. He received the Entertainment Art Expo award for best newcomer in 1999 with **The Fourth Age**, and Best Original Short Story award with *Arrangements For The Deceased. Currently*, Doug is working in the film business."

Negotiations are currently underway with Coin Laundry Films to produce the first of three feature length *Space Chicks* adventures. The Chicks are based on the likenesses of three models - Shannon, Tanya and Kristy - who will be appearing at conventions to support the launch of the book.

Space Chicks is written by creator Vermeeren and pencilled by newcomer Trevor Jameus - who is currently attending the Alberta College of Art, when not beating the skins as the drummer of a local band. Inking, colouring and lettering duties are taken up by David Willicome, also new to comics, but with an extensive background in graphic layout and design. His work can be seen in the magazine **Western Living**.

Frontline have plans to release other titles in the next couple of years, all with the aim of bringing something new and different to the comics industry, rather than more of the same old same old. BL

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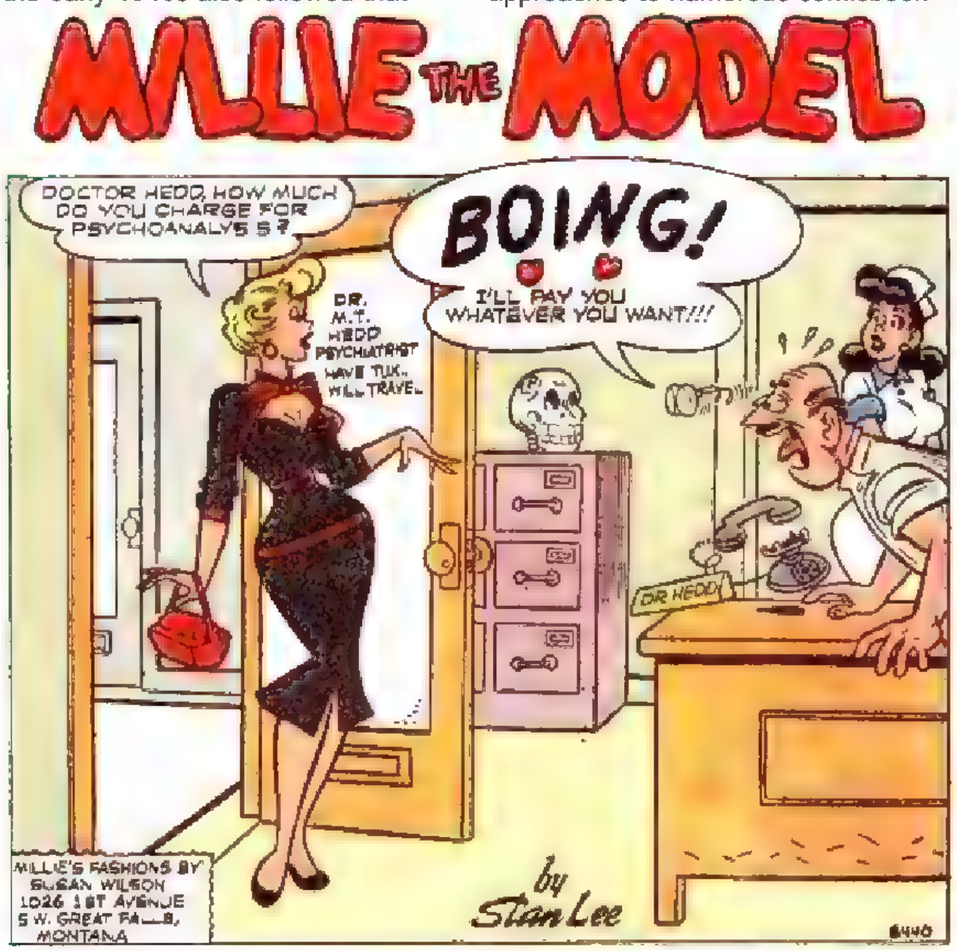
THE ARTISTRY OF DAN DeCARLO

It's easy to say that an artist is "one of the greats", but it's all too rarely said as anything more than an unqualified statement of opinion, to be accepted without question or qualification. Borderline said it of Dan DeCarlo last month when we reported the sad news that he had died on December 19th 2001. As a follow up Mike Kidson now offers his opinion on why Dan DeCarlo was one of the great creators of American comicbooks.

THE American comicbook was originally intended to be funny; Joe Shuster's art for the original Superman stories mixes humorous and serious content in equal measure, and the whirlwind of high speed, high quantity production which followed Superman's success during the early 1940s also followed that stylistic cue. As production began to slow down at the end of the decade, though, the better artists in the field began to refine their styles and, broadly, to vary them according to which genre they worked in. By the time when the Comics Code cracked down on the industry, three distinct approaches to humorous comicbook art had emerged: animation-like "funny animal" art, practiced most brilliantly by Carl Barks; a manic, almost realistic, incident packed satirical method epitomized by the collaborations of Harvey Kurtzman and Will Elder; and a fundamentally similar but gentler, relaxed and far more minimal style of which perhaps the greatest master was Dan DeCarlo. The work of Barks, Kurtzman and Elder has been widely celebrated, often reprinted and hailed as masterpieces of comicbook art. That of DeCarlo has been acknowledged, but otherwise overlooked – perhaps because he was so prolific for more than fifty years, perhaps because he worked for so long on the juvenile comics published by Archie Publications, perhaps because his art "merely" amuses and entertains. To do justice to it would take more than an entire issue of Borderline; what follows, then, is no more than an attempt to describe the fundamental qualities of DeCarlo's art by examining a single four page story, drawn in 1954, which offers a fine example of the unobtrusive skill and precision which he unfailingly employed.


MILLIE THE MODEL
DOCTOR HEDD, HOW MUCH DO YOU CHARGE FOR PSYCHOANALYSIS?
BOING!
I'LL PAY YOU WHATEVER YOU WANT!!!
DR. M.T. HEDD PSYCHIATRIST HAVE TUX... WILL TRAVEL
DR HEDD
MILLIE'S FASHIONS BY SUSAN WILSON 1026 1ST AVENUE S.W. GREAT FALLS, MONTANA
by Stan Lee

The large scene-setting panel opening this untitled story, from Millie The Model #54, tells the reader a great deal with a minimum of detail. Without benefit of rendering techniques such as lighting and shading, the backgrounds clearly convey a hallway and the room onto which it opens with just a few lines, so perfectly placed that even the basic differences in colouring hardly help to establish the illusion of three dimensional depth on this two dimensional page. A few basic icons – the writing on the door, an outlined filing cabinet and desk – indicate clearly that the room is an office. The actual words on the door, the grinning (bandaged) skull and the nurse in he background tell us that Dr. Hedd is a parody medic. The rest of the panel is about reaction to what is seen, which will be the main topic of the story. Establishing a contrast between the serene, "good girl" pose of Millie to the left and the comically exaggerated reactions of Dr. Hedd (and his telephone, name plate and spectacles) on the right, DeCarlo conveys clearly enough that men goggle at Millie, and that Millie has just entered the office of a nutty psychiatrist, leaving writer Stan Lee free to add comic dialogue without the slightest need for verbal scene setting or exposition.

The next five panels are dialogue-driven, doing little more than reinforcing that opening panel with more comedy dialogue and more wacky behaviour for Dr. Hedd. The first page ends with two panels moving Millie and Hedd into position for the psychiatric consultation – DeCarlo enlivens them with some more exaggerated body language on Hedd's part, including the beautifully subtle substitution of a pair of hearts for his irises in panel 2.

The first three panels of the second page conclude the story set-up with a choice example of how to keep an essentially static situation dynamic with the least possible fuss. Body language is the key device – the depiction of Hedd and Millie in different positions in each panel marks both the interaction between the two and the passage of time – but on a less obvious and very practical level DeCarlo keeps the eye engaged while saving himself labour, cutting down on the already minimal background detail so that the couch becomes more and more abstract, and the wall picture becomes just a frame. In the third of the panels he finally draws the same scene slightly more in close up, in effect pulling the reader forwards in preparation for the crucial fourth panel.

Page 2 panel 4 is the lynchpin of the "action" in the story, moving it from set-up sequence to plot motivation, and DeCarlo homes right in on its importance, drawing attention to it in a number of ways but with utmost simplicity.

1/ As Millie takes over the direction of the conversation, the point of view shifts from an objective one to a more subjective position whereby the reader "looks over" Millie's shoulder.

2/ The wisecracking Hedd settles down, his behaviour and expression becoming almost serious.

3/ The circular cameo setting, by breaking the succession of regular rectangular panels, serves a pause in the story, and its shape also acts as a symbolic lens, or even magnifying glass; between these two purposes it slows down the readers' rush through the story and focussing their attention on the panel's content.

4/ Although the use of irregular vertical lines of varying thickness has probably already cued the reader in to the fact that the pink area is a curtain, a quick view of a

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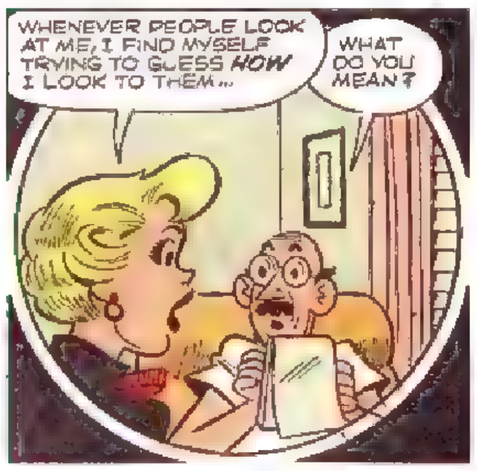
WHAT'S YOUR TROUBLE, MADAM?
PEOPLE ALWAYS LOOK AT ME!
THAT'S TROUBLE?!!
I NEED A PSYCHIATRIST
AND HE'S THE JERK OUT THERE!
JUST A SECOND... I'LL LIE DOWN ON THE COUCH AND LISTEN TO YOUR CASE...
BUT I THOUGHT THE PATIENT LIES ON THE COUCH!
NOT WITH ME, THEY DON'T! WHENEVER MY PATIENTS LIE DOWN ON THE COUCH, THEY FALL ASLEEP!
WE LOSE MORE PATIENTS THAT WAY!!
OH!
NOW TELL ME... HOW DO PEOPLE LOOK AT YOU?
WITH THEIR EYES! WHAT OTHER WAY IS THERE?
YOU DON'T NEED A PSYCHIATRIST...
YOU NEED A JOB WITH ABBOTT AND COSTELLO!
WAIT... I HAVEN'T TOLD YOU THE PROBLEM YET...

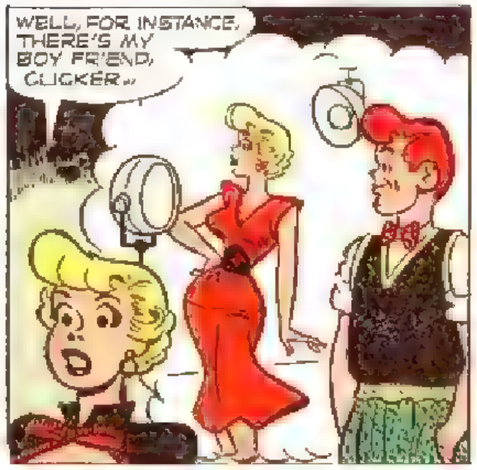
venetian blind confirms it; however, the oddly foreshortened perspective the view requires works with the panel's cameo design to anticipate the next panel's shift away from the simply outlined "realism" of the opening sequence towards a rather different kind of action.

The kind of structural, "mechanical" details described so far do not amount to great artistry. All that the opening sequence of the story indicates is that DeCarlo was an extremely competent craftsman, an artist who understood the mechanics of humorous comicbook storytelling and used them skillfully – attributes which he shared with many others in the field. But after the fourth panel on page 2, something different and much more striking emerges.

That fourth panel's script explains that Millie is having a problem with

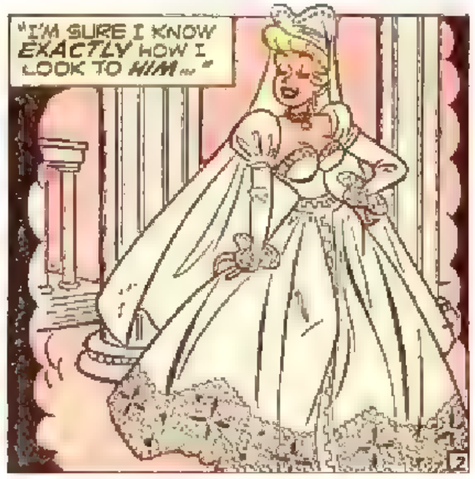


perceptions; she is worried that her friends and family are perceive not who she is but merely the role she plays in their lives and wishes. The concept of existential fear of



objectification is an extraordinarily introspective one for this series at that time – a decade later Stan Lee might well have made of it an issue-length story replete with soap opera soul-searching, but in 1954 Millie The Model was still a madcap comedy book, typically consisting of wisecracking dialogue and physical humour set in the Hanover Modeling Agency and the character's social lives. The challenge of dealing with such inward-looking material in the context of a four page gag strip is what makes this story particularly revealing of the core of Dan DeCarlo's artistry.

Look at the facial expressions in this story. For the first page and a half DeCarlo employed standard comedy types; the psychiatrist is literally an "egghead", while Millie is



a wide-eyed "dumb blonde". Thereafter, though, follows five two-panel sequences in which DeCarlo expresses clearly and simply a rather complex conceit; Millie narrating while visualising, in turn, herself being seen by friends, employer and family, then imagining in visual symbols the ways in which those people objectify what they see. The skill with which this is presented should not be underestimated. A great deal of information is presented without fuss or clutter by deft use of visual puns and iconic tricks, notably the filmic "cloudy outlines" representing a scene imagined – and DeCarlo even paces the sequence, mirroring Millie's increasing engagement with her own narration by shifting from part panel to full panel midway (compare page 3 panel 2 with panels 4 and 6). But this is still just evidence of skill and craft – what lifts it into artistry is the barrage of expressions with which the reader is confronted in this sequence. Anger, annoyance, irritation, jealousy, glee, shock, distress, admonishment, self satisfaction, matter of factness, indulgence... an enormous range of emotional states is clearly evident, and all enliven a complex plot device with absolute clarity and economy. None of them, it should be noted, are even implied in the dialogue – Lee's words provide just the framework for DeCarlo's extraordinary display.

AND THERE'S MY GIRL FRIEND, DAISY...
I MUST LOOK LIKE THE NATIONAL BANK TO HER!
I'LL PAY YA BACK BY SATURDAY, MILLIE!
AND TO MY BOSS, MISTER HANOVER...
I'M SURE I'M NOTHING MORE THAN A PIECE OF SCENERY...
PUT MILLIE OVER THERE NEXT TO THAT TREE!!
BUT TO MY RIVAL, CHILI SEVEN...
I PROBABLY LOOK LIKE A BURGLAR WHO GRABS ALL THE BEST MODELING ASS'N MENTS FROM HER
STOP, THIEF!

So, what made Dan DeCarlo a master humour cartoonist is the essential humanity of his art. The faces of his characters were always simply drawn, just a few lines and curves and characteristically wide eyes, but his subtle manipulations of those curves, in minute detail, enabled him to expres a fuller range of human feeling than most humour cartoonists could achieve. In the end, most of them ended up imitating him; by the end of the 1960s his style had come to dominate not only the many Archie Publications comics he worked on, but also the humour books published by DC and Marvel too (including, ironically, Millie the Model, for the

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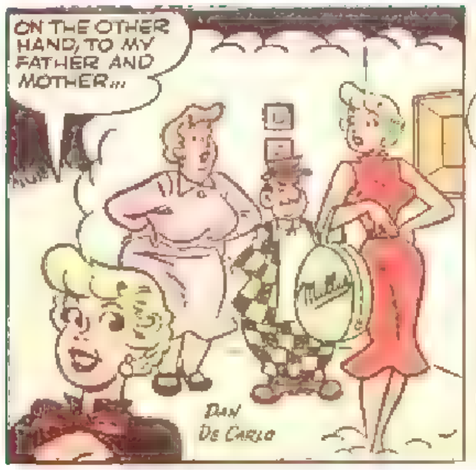
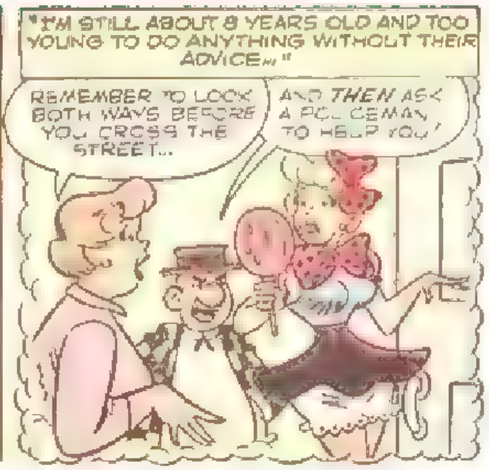


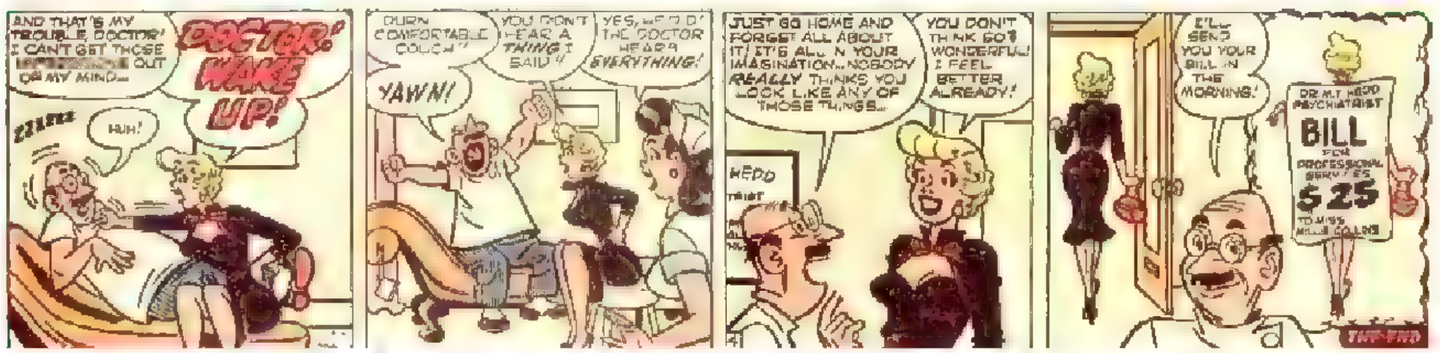

"I'M STILL ABOUT 8 YEARS OLD AND TOO YOUNG TO DO ANYTHING WITHOUT THEIR ADVICE..."
REMEMBER TO LOOK BOTH WAYS BEFORE YOU CROSS THE STREET...
AND THEN ASK A POLICEMAN TO HELP YOU.

last fifty issues of which Stan Lee recycled plots originally drawn by DeCarlo while Stan Goldberg redrew them in the DeCarlo style). But while DeCarlo's craftsmanship, his meticulously minimal drawing style and his clear, concise panel layouts could be imitated skillfully enough, no-one in American comicbooks has ever matched his ability to combine human feeling and reaction with comedy so strongly and attractively.

Compared with this sequence, the final four panels of the story represent a return to skill and craftsmanship as the story is swiftly wrapped up. The reader's point of view is shifted again, pulling back from the couch as Millie's encounter with the psychiatrist ends. The conclusion is perhaps a little cynical – but, in retrospect, readers are well aware that in a Stan Lee script a scientist, if he is not the hero (Reed Richards, Peter Parker, Bruce Banner, Tony Stark...), is either a villain or untrustworthy! Interestingly, DeCarlo didn't play that aspect of it up – he merely recorded it.

All artists of humorous comics combine cartooning with caricature, making the reader laugh by exaggerating physical characteristics and expressions. But for the most part the purpose of caricature is to exaggerate weaknesses, thereby making the reader laugh *at* those who are caricatured. DeCarlo was the early comicbook master of a gentler, warmer style of caricature, one which emphasized feeling rather than weakness and encouraged the reader not only to laugh *with* the characters but to empathise with their reactions. While European comics have produced a similar but separate approach which retains widespread popularity today, DeCarlo's influence on American comicbooks became focused in the output of a single, albeit very successful, publisher once the superhero gene had become dominant. The impact of his gentle, deeply human work undoubtedly lives on, both at Archie and in the work of syndicated cartoonists such as Lynn Johnson; but no-one is now left to rival the greatness of his work... no, his *art*.

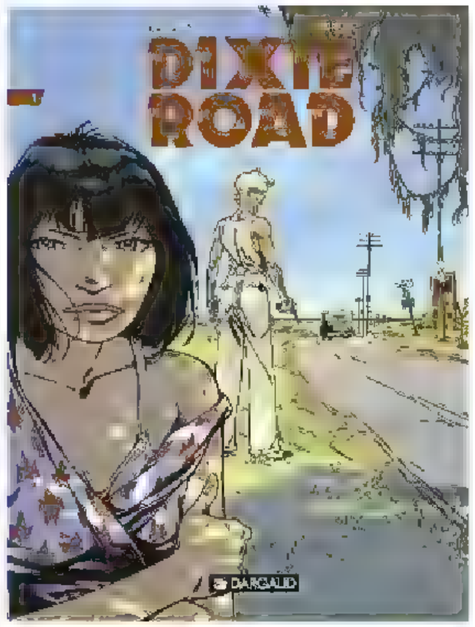
The reproduced panels explained:
1 The first panel uses minimal linework and iconography to establish a closed setting and the characterization of the principals.
2 The following five panels reinforce the first one, and move the characters into position for the main part of the story.
3 Page 2 panel 4 is the pivotal panel in the story - note how DeCarlo emphasises it by using a cameo design, close up and more serious facial expressions.
4 In a sequence of five two-panel sequences DeCarlo uses design, a huge range of facial expressions and a barrage of iconographic gags to convey the humour and, most importantly, the humanity of his characters.
5 The last four panels serve to wrap up the story efficiently and to throw in an iconographic punchline **BL**


DOCTOR! WAKE UP!
HUH!
YAWN!
YOU DON'T HEAR A THING I SAID!
YES, WE'D BETTER GO! THE DOCTOR HEARD EVERYTHING!
JUST GO HOME AND FORGET ALL ABOUT IT! IT'S ALL IN YOUR IMAGINATION... NOBODY REALLY THINKS YOU LOOK LIKE ANY OF THOSE THINGS...
YOU DON'T THINK SO? WONDERFUL! I FEEL BETTER ALREADY!
I'LL SEND YOU YOUR BILL IN THE MORNING!
DR. M.T. HEDD PSYCHIATRIST
BILL
$25

This Millie The Model story copyright Sphere Publications Inc. 1954, reprinted with thanks to Marvel Comics

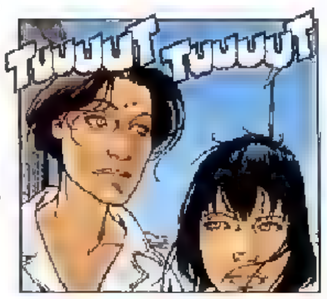
CONTINENTAL DRIFT

Germany's Kevin Schomburg continues his European odyssey



IN the early 90s Hollywood saw a resurgence of the "road movie" in the tradition of genre classics like *Easy Rider* and *Zabriskie Point* and books like *The Grapes of Wrath* and *On the Road*. Films like *Thelma and Louise*, *California*, *Natural Born Killers* and others re-established well known motifs: travelling as a means of personal liberation, identification of home in opposition to being on the road, inherently violent behaviour and arbitrary victimization, landscape as a means of expressing emotion and the embodiment of American ideals.

Although the metaphorical image of being on the road is picked up quite often in contemporary comic books, especially those that deal with travel or lost identity like **Hellblazer** or **The Land-Without-Evil**[1], the genre has not yet made a full transition into medium. However, **Dixie Road** by Jean Dufaux and Hugues Labiano takes another big step that way. The book picks up on all the classic elements and adds spice, in the form of a gangster story, to achieve a truly amazing and thrilling whole. The album is named after 14 year old protagonist Dixie Jones, who lives in Louisiana around the time of the late 1920s Depression era. Her mother works at the local factory and fights for workers' rights and fair payment. When one day Dixie's father Jones (no first name asked, none given) returns with the booty from a bank robbery, things start to get messy. Jones is being followed by his accomplice in the robbery, who he cheated out of his share, and Dixie's mother is followed by the factory owner's son Duchamp, who is eager for a whole different share. At the end of the meeting



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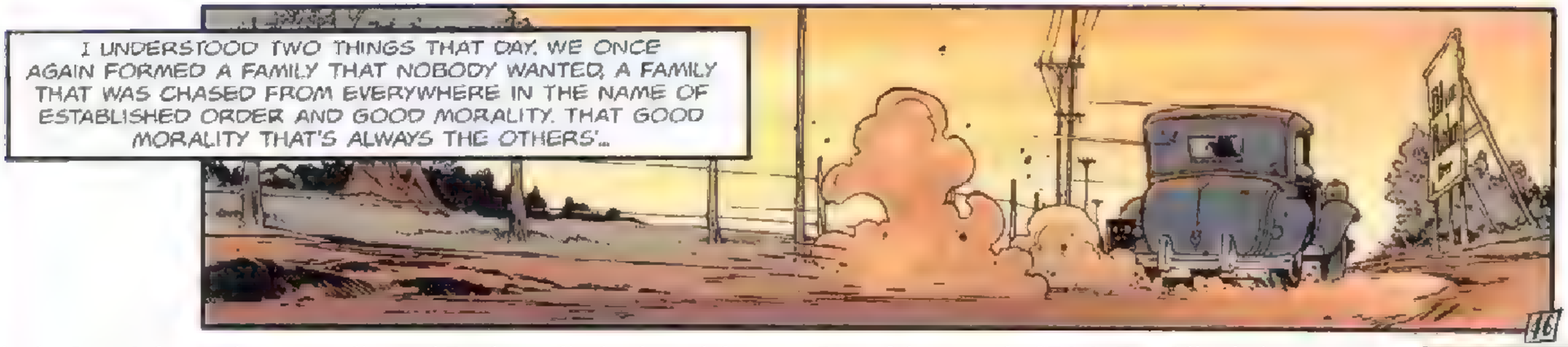

I UNDERSTOOD TWO THINGS THAT DAY. WE ONCE AGAIN FORMED A FAMILY THAT NOBODY WANTED, A FAMILY THAT WAS CHASED FROM EVERYWHERE IN THE NAME OF ESTABLISHED ORDER AND GOOD MORALITY. THAT GOOD MORALITY THAT'S ALWAYS THE OTHERS'...

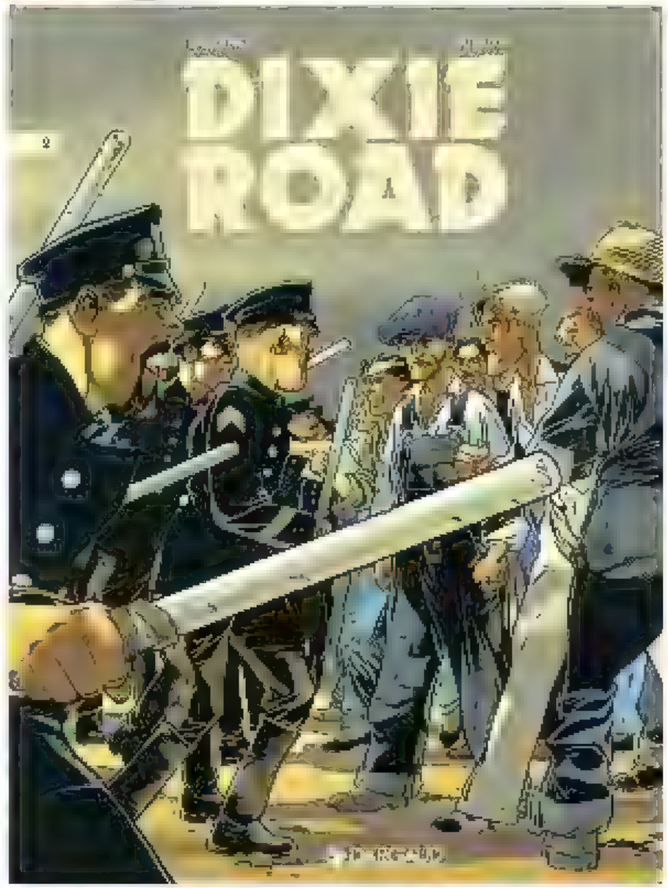
Pictures: a selection of illustrations from Dixie Road, including the cover to the second album directly below.

in the Jones's house the accomplice and Duchamp lie dead - and the reunited family has to flee their home.

Hunted by the police, Duchamp's henchmen and a private detective - who knows something about the past of Dixie's mother - the three set off on a flight through a rural America of old Fords and racial inequality, an America where everybody is armed to the teeth and social stratification places some above the law and some below. The interests of the different parties clash at a gas station in the middle of nowhere and climax in a gunfight which takes its toll. Though Jones can get his family out of immediate danger the first album ends with Dixie's realization that they are unwanted everywhere and that there is no use in looking back; she accepts the road as her new home.

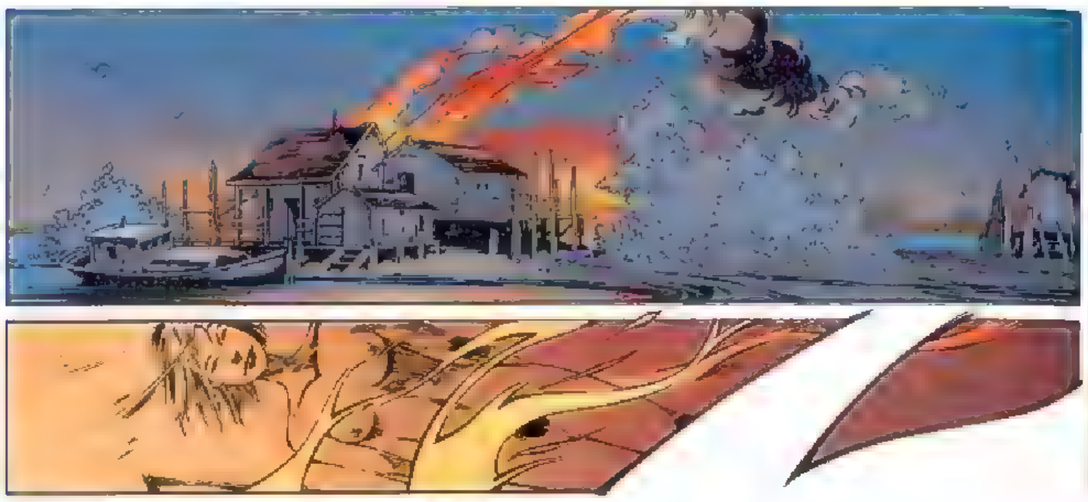
The subject of lost or forbidden identity is a constant buzzing in the background of this tale, a thematic "white noise" which precludes true identification of its protagonists. And although some bridges are burned - even literally when a nude drawing of Dixie goes up in flames with the dead body of the artist who portrayed her - others, like the secret of her mother's past, are bound to be crossed by the travellers one day…

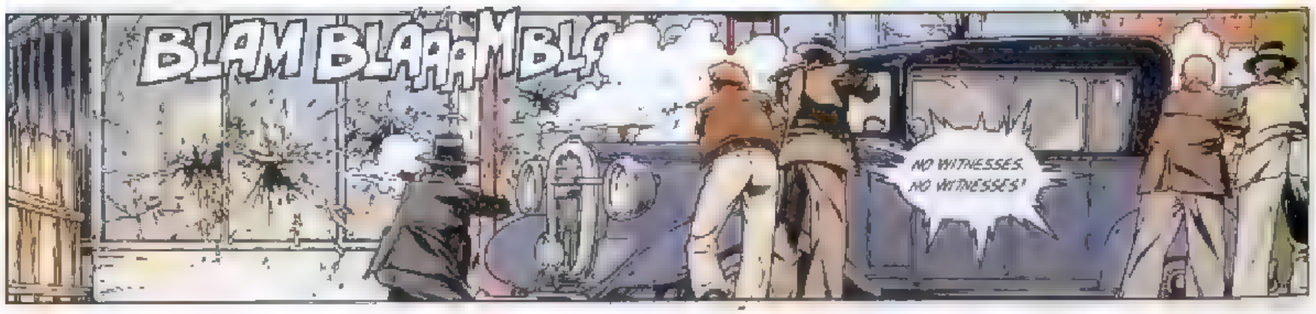
Part of the appeal of **Dixie Road** lies in its delicately structured story; the farther one reads on, the more it seems to negotiate yet another bend, to introduce yet another character to further complicate matters for the Jones's. It is also an extremely well drawn comic book and the artist's work on the characters as well as on the surroundings seems eager to impress with its fluent and beautiful detail. Labiano's sense of design and his composition of action scenes is more often reminiscent of a John Ford movie than of classic French comic action. The fact that every panel in the book has a detailed background to catch the reader's eye rounds off what is overall an exemplary visual impression.



Note
1. See Borderline #3 for details.

Dixie Road #1 is a 48 p. SC album by Jean Dufaux and Hugues Labiano, published by NBM for $10.95. Its second issue has come out recently. Jean Dufaux also writes Raptors for artist Enrico Marini, also published by NBM.





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BURNING DOWN THE CURTAIN

Has Marvel installed a new revolving door? Rich Johnston is wondering about it...

APOLOGIES for last month's absence. The column seems to have got lost in the ether. I blame Bill Gates. It's usually a good bet.

This month saw a little bit of Marvel Comics déja vu. It wasn't so long ago, under Bob Harras' regime, that the term "Marvelcution" was coined to describe the series of massive job cuts across the company which came after the market crashed, slumped and then overdosed on sleeping tablets.

While Harras seemed happy to go along with his bosses' wishes to chop at every corner, when they fired a disabled guy who'd previously been given assurances of continued employment Harras lost it. It was that incident, among others, that saw to his eventual replacement and the rise of the Bill Jemas and Joe Quesada team.

After a few boom months, it looks like Marvel is back to its old ways. Last year, the departure of long-time editor Bobbie Chase made waves. In the last few months we've seen the departure of Deb Krier, originator of the Marvel Authorised Fan Site Program and Kwanza Johnson (otherwise known as Marvel Dog), Production Editor for Marvel.com. Which means that, aside from Bill Rosemann's *Your Man* column and the DotComics, Marvel.com's features will no longer be updated. We haven't seen any more of those much vaunted "comics trailers" of late, nor of the new message board system that was promised. It's a dead site.

There have also been significant cuts in marketing, reproduction, and licensing; these culminated in the firing of Director of Publishing Operations, Bob Greenberger, Special Projects (below, right) Co-ordinator Mike Farah, Designer Camille Murphy and Digital Assistant Jessica Schwartz. Editorial, however, remained untouched - indeed, Marvel is currently hiring Associate Editors.

Stories abound about employees reprimanded for using the internet. After a secretary was fired for making personal calls, everyone started using their mobile phones - and making a big thing of it. There have been allegations of inefficiency and inexperience - the departure of Collected Editions head Ben Abernathy a short while ago, with his workload then split between the team, didn't exactly help matters either. There may have also been issues of space; I've been told that, to save money, Marvel has been renting out one of their levels so that everyone is now squeezed onto the remaining one floor.

But Bob Greenberger's dismissal seemed to be a separate thing to the others. Headhunted from a dotcom company, Greenberger had a solid history of keeping schedules tight at DC for over a decade. His hiring by Marvel was part of a coup which also saw Stuart Moore, Axel Alonzo and Jenny Lee welcomed into the fold. Greenberger was also present in what's now been called the "Sentinels, Not Senators" meeting, where the Comics Code subscribers Marvel, DC, Dark Horse and Archie met up just as Marvel was about to leave the code. Jemas and Quesada brought only ex-DC employees to the meeting to represent them - and to wind up Paul Levitz.

With Marvel's schedule slipping further and further, Greenberger was hired to fix things and fix them fast. And while there wasn't an instant change, Marvel's books have been becoming less tardy by the month.

However, there seems to be a more personal agenda at work here. The word is that Greenberger (left), with a long history in comics' corporate management, simply didn't fit in. On one side, I'm told that "his firing has more to do with the current 'corporate' culture at Marvel than anything else - and Greenberger tried to blend in with that, but ultimately he didn't fit in well. What is the Marvel corporate culture these days? It seems to be that whole Brooklyn Bizarre/strip club/ chemical life and the bad boyz attitude that's seen in **Wizard** and **Maxim** and elsewhere - the older nerds with hormones and undefined anger raging. There's no place for folks like Greenberger and Bobbie Chase in that kind of atmosphere." On the other, I'm told Greenberger was using the position as a power base to get hold of other responsibilities at Marvel - which really rubbed off badly on other staff. Especially considering Greenberger's... how shall we put it... frankness with his co-workers. As one pro put it "When a lone gunslinger rides into town to clean things up, he makes a lot of enemies."

Greenberger told me, "Marvel said they were restructuring the Special Projects group (left) and as a result my services were no longer required. Nothing was said with regard to the Publishing Operations portion of my job (i.e. the position held by David Bogart) or Marketing (Bill Rosemann) or Business Affairs (Chet Krayewski)."

Greenberger also told me, "Within an hour of word getting out, I received two calls, both outside of comics. Additionally, two different comic companies got in touch about possible consulting work. So, I walk into the job search with a degree of optimism that I will find something. I can still project manage or run departments and hope to find something challenging in the media world."

Naturally there is some unrest at Marvel as a result - and that's the reason for a lot of leaks that came my way. But we'll have to wait to see if Greenberger's departure is going to be the start of a long term series of "downsizing" or just temporary rescheduling.

On a related note, the ads in trade paperbacks that Greenberger is believed to have objected to and to which he only acquiesced in the **Banner** trade paperback as an "experiment" come into play next month on a permanent basis.

And on a related related note, Bill Jemas was recently promoted from Publisher to Chief Operating Officer. His yearly salary (without perks or bonuses) is now over half a million dollars. You could buy quite a lot of Bob Greenbergers with that. With fries, to go.

BL

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ISSUES

Carol Close is seriously on one

THOSE three gimps from Planetary have inspired me to do my own bit of covert archaeology this month - digging into the secrets of the comics industry and revealing those titles and series that were meant to appear on the shelves this year but mysteriously never will...

The X-istentialists #1 (Marvel): Jean Paul Sartre! Albert Camus! Soren Kierkegaard! Martin Heidegger! Rene Descartes! Introducing Marvel's latest, greatest gang of Merry Mutant Mayhem Makers!

Aliens vs Predator vs That Cockroach Thing From Mimic vs One Of Them Smart Sharks From Deep Blue Sea (Dark Horse): They all fight and, um, that's it.

Ultimate Jesus Christ #1 (Marvel): Beginning a fantastic new era of greatness with everyone's favourite Prince of Peace. And just wait until you see Mark Bagley's Ultimate Judas!

Super Villain Sob Fest #1 (Marvel): Every month some of the Marvel Universe's most twisted bad guys get together to weep like babies over the state of the world. This month the Hobgoblin and Kang cry themselves stupid over the escalation of hostilities between India and Pakistan. Writer: J. Michael Straczynski.

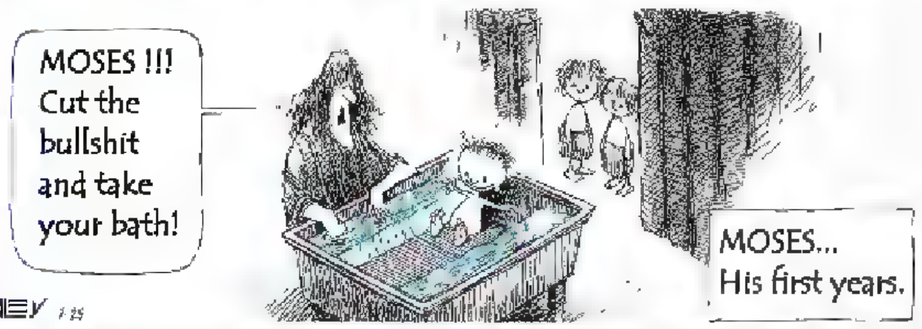
Young Girl Big Tits #1 (Com.X): Hilarious satire on er... young girls with big tits. Note to retailers: this title is most definitely aimed at 12-18-year-old girls and not at pre-pubescent boys or dirty old men.

Just Imagine Stan Lee... Naked (DC): Eeewww!

Benito Mussolini: Agent Of S.H.I.E.L.D. #1 (Marvel MAX): More fast and furious fun with everyone's favourite fascist. This month Il Duce sticks it to the disabled... with hilarious and violent consequences. Writer: Garth Ennis.

Punk Rock, Yay! #1 (Oni): Oni celebrates its recent discovery of the crazy new musical phenomenon people are already calling punk rock. 'We just love punk,' says Oni big cheese, Jamie S. Vicious, "especially The Clash Pistols and Huey Lewis & The News". Might have a page or two missing.

Codename Knipples (Vertigo): Attention 12-year-old boys – you sometimes see a girl's bum and boobies in this comic. No lady-garden, though, that would be rude and sexist.



Hey true believer, if you liked Ultimate Jesus, you're going to love Ultimate Moses: Year One!

The Dark Knight Takes A Dump... On Superman (DC): Writer/Artist: Frank Miller.

Paul Daniels vs Siegfried & Roy #1 (ABC): Alan Moore's exploration of magic continues in this fantastic four-issue mini.

Transmetropolitan #55 (Vertigo): Spider Jerusalem crosses swords with The Forum, a sinister worldwide network of sycophants in the employ of a mysterious entity known only as Ell'is.

Ultimate Macbeth #1 (Marvel): Mark Millar updates Shakey's dreary old Scottish play. And just wait until you see Adam Kubert's Ultimate Banquo!

Osama Bin Laden Smells (Marvel): This month's September 11 tribute book (Marvel's 45th) features several childishly insulting depictions of Bin Laden himself. Alex Ross draws him with a bogey hanging out of his nose, while Kevin Smith has cleverly scrawled the words 'I is a gay' in a speech bubble coming from his mouth. All proceeds to Mar... er, the Twin Towers Fund.

O'Superman #2 (DC): Having rescued the fair city of Belfast from Seamus O'Brainiac, Clark O'Kent pops round to Alex Higgins's place for a pint of the Black Stuff. To be sure. Writer: Garth Ennis. Artists: Patrick Kielty and Eamonn Holmes.

Just Imagine Stan Lee... Hanging About Outside Your House While You're Asleep (DC): Double eeewww!

Rude Words #1 (Marvel MAX): Brian Michael Bendis really pushes the envelope with this new series about a private detective who used to be a superhero. Contains 23 uses of the "f" word on the first two pages and one of those really long but strangely irrelevant scenes with lots and lots of speech bubbles on.

The Curmudgeonly Com.X Chumping Society is proud to present: Impenetrable Bilge #1 – we still have no idea what is going on...

I Love That Clint Eastwood I Do #1 (Black Bull): Garth Ennis... rugged American men... cowboy hats... big guns... friendship and loyalty - look, you know the drill by now, surely? Probably features a character called Shitface, too.

The X-Chequer #1 (Marvel): Budget Man! The Bureaucrat! Civil Servant Girl! Treasury Lass! Introducing Marvel's latest, greatest gang of Merry Mutant Mayhem Makers!

Superman: Tosser (DC): Clark Kent's alter ego gets the crap beaten out of him by some old women and a six-year-old boy. Writer/Artist: Frank Miller.

Luke Cage: Darky For Hire #1 (Marvel MAX): Luke Cage is a former superhero turned private eye. He's also black, so expect him to have gold teeth, say the word "nigga" a lot, and want to do every white woman he meets up the Khyber Pass. Writer: Brian Michael Bendis. Artists: Ali G and Uncle Remus.

Marvel Pornoverse #1 (Marvel): What if 'adult entertainment' stars had created the Marvel Universe? Find out here as writer/artist team Asia Carrera and TT Boy bring you Spider-Man and The Wasp in *The Money Shot*.

Impenetrable Bilge #1 (Com.X): We have no idea what's going on in this title, so you'll just have to work it out for yourselves.

The X-Ploiters #1 (Marvel): Capitalist Bastard Man! Fat Cat Boy! Minimum Wage Girl! Rupert Murdoch! Introducing Marvel's latest, greatest gang of Merry Mutant Mayhem Makers!

Gordon Glorious #3 (ABC): Alan Moore's homage to pulp heroes of the past continues in this great new adventure. Half way through, the book's modern day setting suddenly switches to a 1940s comic book style, which was really clever the first 206 times he did it, but has started to grate a bit lately.

Ultimate Mansfield Park #1 (Marvel): Mark Millar gives Jane Austen's 19th century classic a Mighty Marvel reboot. And just wait until you see Chynna Clugston-Major's Ultimate Fanny!

I Am the Egg Man, Goo Goo G'Joob #1 (Vertigo): Grant Morrison's been at the funny fags again.

Just Imagine Stan Lee... Stroking Your Thigh (DC): [*That's enough Stan Lee - Borderline Ed.*] BL

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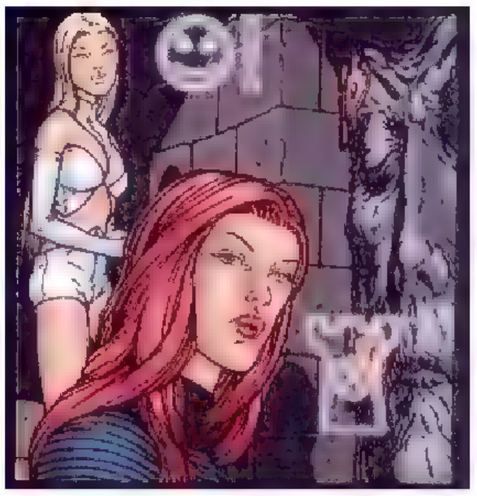
THE BLANK PAGE

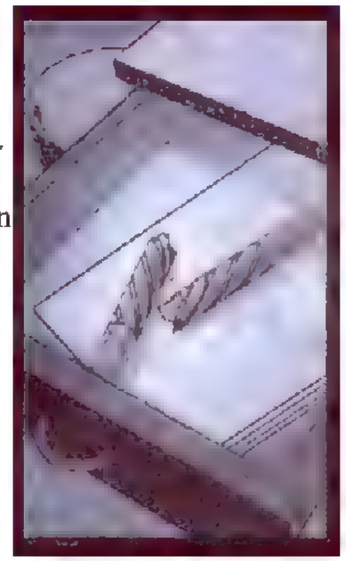
Action speaks louder than words? Chev doesn't thinks so...

LAST month, Marvel released its *'Nuff Said* issues, comics told entirely with art and without the clarifying benefit of dialogue and captions. Their decision to run the scripts to each issue at the back of the comic does at least show the reader that it is not just the artist at work, but that the writer still has to address many of the normal problems of constructing a comic story. However, a direct comparison between the scripts and the finished art shows how discrepancies and misinterpretations can lead to confusion in the narrative, and subsequently, in the reader.

For instance, there is a sequence in Paul Jenkins' script for **Peter Parker: Spider-Man** that is so surreal that it would be almost impossible to draw under most circumstances. It concerns a sentient block of cheese in Peter's fridge trying to attract his attention and failing. After an initial black panel, the second panel is supposed to also contain a blank, icy thought balloon. Except that it looks more like a hole has been knocked in the solid dark of the previous panel, with the iciness adding a 3-D effect and the dots that form the tail of the balloon looking like debris raining down. Then we are inside a fridge, with the block of cheese showing an exclamation mark at the sight of Peter opening the door. Except that the cheese is not drawn as anything that even slightly resembles cheese in any way, and no attention is drawn to it, so that the exclamation mark looks as if it is connected to Peter, somehow startled by his own opening of a fridge door. So much for Spider Sense. From then on the entire page devolves into unintelligibility and, although the rest of the issue is fine, shows that sometimes the writer's reach can exceed not only his own grasp, but also that of his artist.



Grant Morrison's script for **New X-Men** is incredibly interesting to read in and of itself. He does however, and for reasons I cannot fathom, decide to utilise a set of pictograms that Jean Grey and Emma Frost use to psychically communicate. Not only are these pictograms almost perversely difficult to decipher, but they are also entirely superfluous to Quitely's informative artwork, which already conveys all the information necessary to follow the story. Their addition, in fact, hampers the storytelling of the artwork, something Quitely cannot be accused of normally.



As a textbook case of how successfully a writer is served by his artists, we can learn much from Brian Michael Bendis' silent two-parter in **Daredevil** and **Elektra**. These two issues are connected only ephemerally, or rather they would be if not for **Daredevil** being drawn by the wonderful Alex Maleev and **Elektra** being rendered (if that's even the word) by Chuck Austen. One of the key crossover elements

"It concerns a sentient block of cheese in Peter's fridge..."

is a broken billyclub, which, when we see Matt using one half of it in **Daredevil**, is instantly recognisable as such. Despite being broken in two, it is drawn by Maleev to look like one half of a billyclub, and coloured in red by Matt Hollingsworth to aid in the effect. Chuck Austen draws the same item in **Elektra**, but makes it look like two cigars, which effect is compounded by Nathan Eyring's colouring them in that dreadful shade of brown-grey that makes most pages of **Elektra** look like they've been left out in the rain. In fact, it wasn't until reading the script for **Elektra** that I realised the cigars were even meant to be two halves of the same broken billyclub. This may sound like an inconsequential complaint, but Bendis has tried to do something clever here: not only two silent issues featuring a hero with super-hearing and a stealthy ninja assassin respectively, but also a crossover that truly works together and separately. You can tell from the scripts what he is hoping to achieve; however only one of his artistic collaborators is up to his standard. Unfortunately for Austen, the practice of a writer later adjusting the script to cover the incompetence of poor art doesn't apply here.

It is perhaps obvious that two of the most successful *'Nuff Said* issues are simple stories simply told; yet even here there is a huge disparity in the ambition behind them. Steve Dillon's **Punisher** has almost nothing to recommend it, so unadventurous is it, yet the story is clear and easy to follow from start to finish. His script (if such it can be called) amounts to something like 24 words, which works out to just over one per page, and it is plain that this story exists in Dillon's head and he has then transferred it to the page as an artist, not as a writer.

Bruce Jones' **Incredible Hulk** has more ambition in it, and it is ably realised by John Romita Jr. Jones writes his script in the fashion of a short story, with each paragraph roughly equating to one panel of art. It is what may seem a simple and workmanlike approach, but one advantage is that it works. This *'Nuff Said* issue is as clear and concise as you could wish, telling the story with all of the author's objectives intact. Interestingly, this script had editorial suggestions appended to it, all of which Romita Jr. adopts; the sign of an artist who is confident not only in his own talent and ability, but also those of his writer and editor.

If there is one thing that the *'Nuff Said* experiment has shown, it is that Marvel's comics are a collaboration between the writers' intention and the artists' ability to translate that into pictures, both tempered with the guidance of editors whose innate grasp of both these disciplines allows them to help craft the success of the final product.

Also, that mainstream comics are often difficult enough to follow at the best of times without adding to the confusion with gimmicks, which more often than not, only serve to make that process more complicated. BL

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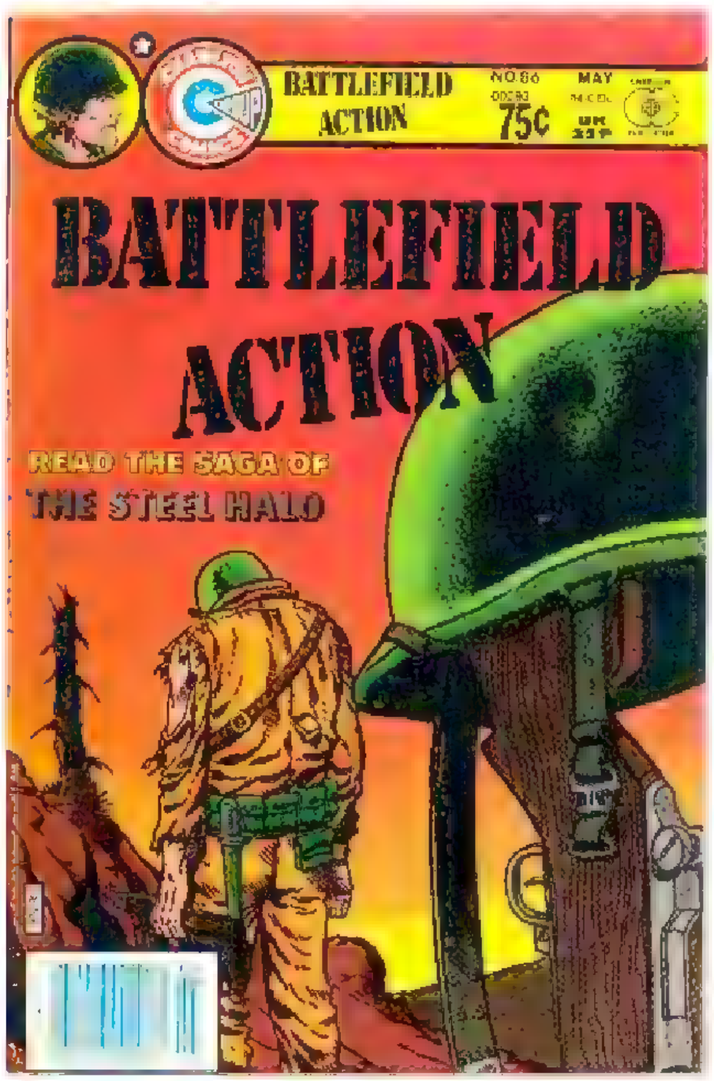
LEARNING CURVES

Sarah Littlehales speculates to accumulate

I See A Red Door And I Want It Painted Black

THERE'S no denying that we live in an increasingly violent society. We may not have gladiatorial combats for entertainment anymore, but we certainly expect a good arse-kicking on our TVs, at the cinema, and in our comics. US comicbooks and violence in particular pretty much go hand-in-hand; after all, what's the point of spandex-clad heroes with big muscles and super powers if they don't use those powers and muscles to clobber each other (and the scenery)? But outside of the outrageous super-battles, there's always been room for a more respectable sort of fighting which we rarely see these days.



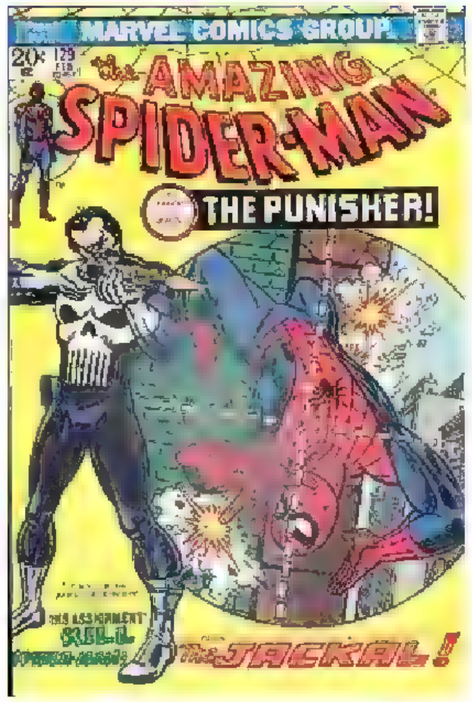
When you think of **The 'Nam** (Marvel) or *Sgt Rock* in **Our Army at War** (DC), you don't think of casual brawls where things and people can easily be replaced. War comics like these displayed a mature sensitivity with regard to the true cost of violence on such a grand scale. And right now, in our current climate of terrorism and international war, it seems that stories of brave American soldiers fighting the good fight are just what the doctor ordered.

The popularity of these fondly-remembered classics has risen once again (not that it sank that far). Well thought out and executed by the likes of Joe Kubert and Russ Heath, these sorts of comics have wedged themselves into the nostalgic heart of many a reader. And it seems that, with our present political problems, they've become a reassuring comfort blanket to help deal with the new worries of day-to-day life.

No Holds Barred, Don't Spare the Bullets

Then again, going completely in the other direction - away from the sombre and serious - super-violence, death and wanton destruction are always popular. Proof of this re-emergence of the luxuriously violent comic is the rise in popularity of The Punisher.

Long a favourite with testosterone-filled adolescents everywhere, Frank Castle has been gunning down gangsters and thugs for more than 20 years, since his first appearance in **Amazing Spider-Man #129**. His lifetime crusade - spurred on by the personal torment of his inability to protect his family - gradually wore thin, and his favour in the market was at a low



for almost a decade. With sales on new issues low and prices for those back issues in a slump, Joe Quesada was expected to wave his magic *Marvel Knights* wand and grace old Frank with the same new breath of life already exhaled into **Daredevil**. Unfortunately, Joe & Co. got it completely wrong by trying to re-invent the **Punisher** as an avenging Angel with mystical guns. Completely alienating the remaining fan-base, this was the most hated miniseries of its time.

However, ever since Garth Ennis and Steve Dillon gave the Punisher the "Preacher make-over", fans and traders alike just can't get enough of the skull-clad, gun-toting vigilante. Sales rocketed, interest rose to a new high, and as Marvel refused to go to a second print run the returning fans lapped up trade paperback reprints as well.

At the moment, this new approach is working miracles, and Frankie can do no wrong. The original success is being repeated; let's hope it won't be churned out again and again until it wears thin.

And now for something scantily clad...

Her name is Meriem. She fights

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The Frank Cho Jungle Experience: no not a name for a new rave band, but a selection of his exclusive (to Basement Comics) pictures of Cavewoman in various degrees of undress!

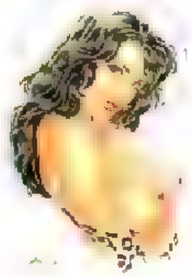
dinosaurs. She's also a buxom young wench in a leopard-skin bikini who fights to protect the time-displaced town of Marshville. And she's an incredibly popular girl!

Which means she's an expensive date too. Taking this curvaceous heroine home with you will set you back a fair penny, but that's the price you pay for loving Basement Comics' **Cavewoman**. Budd Root's creation may have grown up in the Cretaceous Period but she sprang to life from the pages of **Previews**. From just a tiny advert in the midst of the comics wholesaler's catalogue, Cavewoman has grown in popularity and advertising space.

To the jaded it would appear to be just another T&A title. After all, when you're looking at tits like that, in a book with provocative covers and pin-ups, then who really cares about the lost eight-year-old who grew up to be the protecting primeval goddess of some backwater town? Who cares that she spent 11 years alone in the prehistoric wilderness, and that she believes that the spirit of her grandfather helps guide her through life?

Well, yeah, there's no denying that **Cavewoman** is blatant jungle-pulp-adventure

cheesecake. But then Root has help from the likes of Frank Cho, the man who made men drool over Brandy the veterinarian in **Liberty Meadows** and the king of King Kong-style monkeys menacing damsels in distress. Cho has not only backed up Root with the art chores (which means Meriem does look remarkably like Brandy), but has raised the general awareness of **Cavewoman**, which in turn has helped to hike demand and price.



Just don't let your dinosaur obsessed kids see it, as they might get a different kind of anatomy lesson from what they were expecting. BL

BORDERLINKS

seanmckeever.com
writer + designer + remixer

MARVEL.COM

SilverBullet Comics

BugPowder

Digital Webbing

YOUR LINK HERE

BORDERLINE AFFILIATES:

Want to become a Borderline Affiliate? You can either have a Borderline Download point on your site, or you can have a Borderline banner or button which links directly to our site – all you need to do is have something on your site which states clearly what we are and how to get to us.

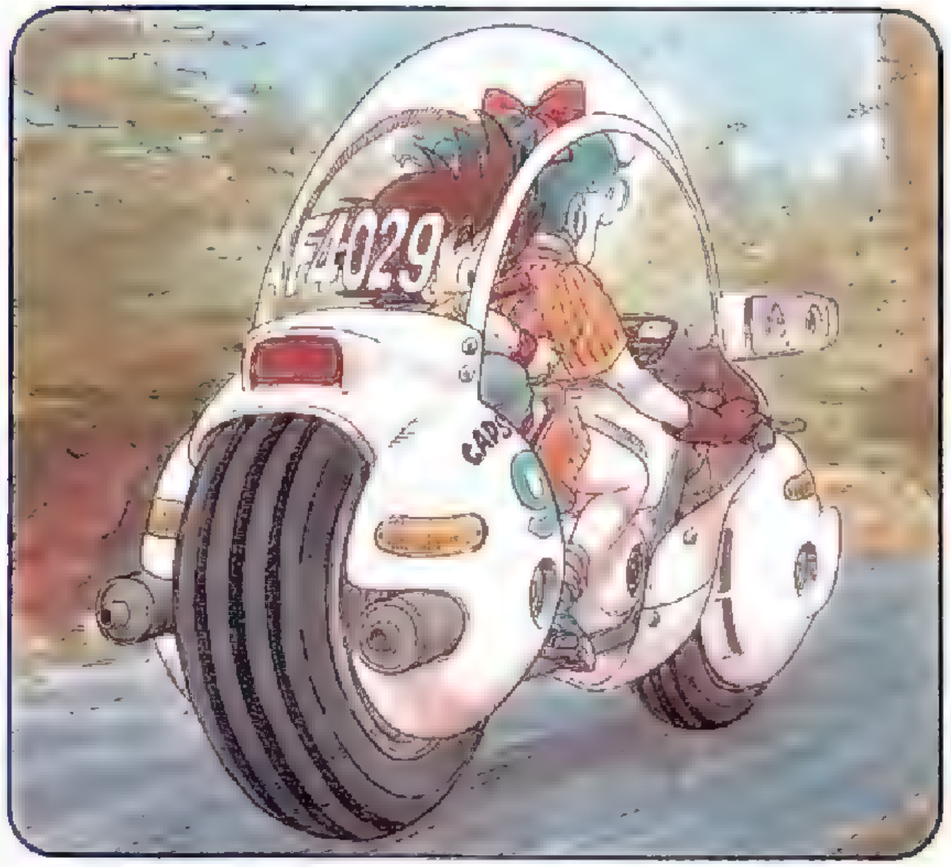
ADVERTISE IN BORDERLINE:

½ page - 135mm x 190mm
£100 ($145)
¼ page - 135mm x 92mm
or 67mm x 190mm
£55 ($85)
1/5 page - 50mm x 190mm
£45 ($70)
Display Classifieds:
50mm x 90mm £25 ($40)
50mm x 40mm £15 ($25)
Banner - 10mm x 275mm £30 ($45)
BL Gold - Cover banner (15mm x 280mm) + ½ page advert
£350 ($500)
contact Phil Hall (details page 2)

WHAT IS MANGA?

Kevin Hill does his best not to give away too many plot details about not one but two Dragon Ball series!

The World of Akira



... AKIRA TORIYAMA, that is!

Akira is a decent name. Akira Kurosawa brought us *Yojimbo*, and *Seven Samurai*, which begat "spaghetti westerns" such as *A Fistful Of Dollars* and *The Magnificent Seven*. Akira was also the name of an epic science-fiction comic - a monster that spawned a film which gave rise to the 90s anime boom - more on that comic soon. It is also the first name of the creator of some of the best Japanese action comics ever to have been translated - his name is Akira Toriyama, and he is the creator of Dragon Ball.

The western release of Dragon Ball is unusual for many reasons. Firstly, there are not one, but two series being released concurrently - the original Dragon Ball (DB), and its sequel Dragon Ball Z (DBZ), even though these are set many years apart. They are both published monthly with collections appearing once enough issues have been released. Secondly, even though the comics appear fairly fresh, the Dragon Ball series was first published in the mid-80s - it's taken that long to be translated into English, which is unusual for a series as popular in the east as Dragon Ball is (though that time delay is soon to be outdone in spectacular style with the translation and release of Osamu Tezuka's Astroboy by Dark Horse Comics - more on that in coming months). And lastly, unlike many western translations of Japanese comics, both Dragon Ball series have been released in their Japanese format - reading right to left. While that can be initially confusing, the comic soon begins to flow just as well as your average Superman comic.

The Dragon Ball world is our own Earth, only an Earth shared with various creatures, real and unreal, and thousands of anthropomorphs. The Earth also contains the eponymous Dragon Balls, seven spheres that, when collected together, can grant a wish to whomever is present. Although things do start fairly sedately, as you can imagine all hell breaks loose when untrustworthy - i.e. evil - parties attempt to obtain the Dragon Balls.

While the Dragon Balls are the key to both series, DB and DBZ differ in both tone and action, the former being more of an action comedy in the vein of Jackie Chan movies, and the latter a more violent epic akin to a Bruce Lee movie. Why the comparisons with martial arts movies? Because as well as the Dragon Balls, the series prominently features martial arts fighters, most notably Son Goku, the likeliest character for "lead" status in both series.

Akira Toriyama has taken the style of Hong Kong martial arts movies and squeezed them into the limited, storyboard-like, scope of comics. The result delivers fight scenes that take not just panels but entire pages to tell. With the format that Viz Comics has used to release the monthly instalments, these fights can sometimes take up entire issues. And they aren't basic fights, oh no. These are martial arts fights, featuring characters with many moves, including special abilities that are reminiscent of the Street Fighter arcade game - for fans of video games, we're talking chi

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blasts like those of Ryu and Ken.

So, what of the stories? Well, I don't want to spoil them. Really. Obviously I need to tell you a little bit about them, otherwise how can I convince you to read them? Dragon Ball, being the earlier series, slowly introduces the topic of Dragon Balls through the appearance of Bulma - a teenager who is searching for them in order to obtain a wish she feels will make her happy. In the course of this hunt, she runs across a young Son Goku - a wild boy of amazing strength and skill, who also happens to own a Dragon Ball, a gift from his dear departed Grandfather Son Gohan. Because Goku doesn't want to lose this heirloom, he decides to join Bulma on her quest. Naturally, things happen. I'll stop at this point. Doing so infuriates me - I want to tell you all the great things that happen, but if I did, what would be the point of reading the comic?

A bit about Dragon Ball Z then. Since it takes place after the events of the Dragon Ball series, some of what I might say may reveal the odd piece of information that you might not want to hear if you wish to read both series. As it is, the end of Dragon Ball is a teensy bit far off in terms of Viz Comics' release schedule - this being shown by the fact that the collected volumes of both series are numbered as a whole and by series, with 42 collected volumes in total. DBZ Vol. 1 is thus numbered as 17 of 42 - and both series are about at the point of the seventh volume being released. So, if you don't want to know anything of Dragon Ball Z, but want to find out yourself, skip the next paragraph... go!

As I said, Dragon Ball Z takes place after the end of the original series. The pace also picks up somewhat, featuring fight upon fight upon fight, with deaths, resurrections, aliens, psychotics, psychotic aliens, and fights - did I mention the fights? Things start very quietly, with a now adult Son Goku introducing his young boy Son Gohan to his friends. Then the bad guy arrives - the first of many. Also thrown into the mix are revelations about Goku's heritage, plus that of the God Kami-Sama - whose origin will be quite familiar, being near identical to that of Superman, doomed planet and all. Dragon Ball Z also reveals incredibly powerful characters, most of which outdo the entire cast of the original series - bar Son Goku, who gradually becomes more and more powerful in each successive volume.

To conclude, I can only really say - read it. Enjoy it. Be fascinated by it. These are portable martial arts movies, featuring characters who would embarrass most superheroes with their morals, skills, and abilities. And the villains? Doctor Doom, Galactus, they ain't got anything on Toriyama's creations. Would I lie to you? **BL**

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MANONA MISSION

Martin Shipp's vision of a better comics industry

YES, I know this column is always negative and pissy and moany and I really hoped this month would be different, honest I did. But then I read, in my official capacity of Features Editor, this month's contribution from Rich Johnston. If you haven't yet read that, go and do so then come back here. Even if you don't usually read Rich's column, and especially if you've only read his contributions to other places, go and read his column here in **Borderline**.

Done that? Right...

I was thinking a while back about Marvel Comics' outreach programme. More specifically, I was thinking about their Ultimate line. Now, I'll admit straight off the bat that I tried to love the **Ultimates** but I failed, or rather they did. The **Spider-Man** title pissed me off from the start, taking as it did six issues to tell the same story that was told in a dozen or so pages back in **Amazing Fantasy #15**. But I could see why they chose to do this: trade paperback sales are where the long term health of the line lies, and stretching the origin story out to filo-like thinness makes it fill a nice hefty book.

This is by the by, though, as my thoughts then went on to the choice of artists used on the line. Mark Bagley, for instance. I'm sure he's a lovely bloke and that he does regular voluntary work for the community, but you have to admit that he isn't the most distinctive of stylists. He doesn't break new ground; at times it looks like he's trying to mend the old ground, but that very lack of distinction is what made him a perfect choice to pencil the flagship Ultimate title. Nobody who came fresh to comics - nobody in the target audience for the line, anyway - would open a copy of **Ultimate Spider-Man** and be frightened off by the art. Bagley doesn't experiment with deranged orang-utan panel layouts; the reader doesn't need a map to find their way around one of his pages. He's the perfect introductory artist to super-hero comics (the perfect introductory artist to comics, period, I'll leave up to you and your personal aesthetics).

The same line of editorial thought applies to the rest of the line: the Kuberts' big-panel blockbuster-movie style of pencilling suits the **X-Men** title. The **Ultimates/Avengers** is tailor-made for Bryan Hitch, who is very good indeed at drawing larger than life figures and larger than life action, and who proved this while he was pencilling **The Authority**. Even the policy of employing rotating, and sometimes unlikely, artists on **Ultimate Team-Up** is a very clever editorial decision: regular Marvel readers will buy the book, as will readers of, say, Chynna Clugston-Major's **Blue Monday** buy the issues that she pencils. Moreover, the casual newsstand reader who never usually picks up a comicbook might leaf through one of these off-centre issues and think: "Hmmm... Looks nothing like what a comic usually looks like. Looks like a cartoon like they have on TV, or maybe like an advertisement looks. I am made to feel neither threatened nor excluded by this. Therefore I will purchase."

That's what it's all about: getting new readers. Another way of doing this - the most important way - is to get your comics into new retail outlets, and the most important of these outlets is the bookstore. Ask DC, whose trade paperback and **Archives** programme has been growing steadily for years now. Ask Larry Young of AiT/Planet Lar (better, go download **Borderline 6** and read the interviews with Young and with Steve Gerber). Marvel, bless 'em, looked as though they were finally getting a grip on the concept of TPBs, expanding their line, publishing cheap volumes of stuff that may not have the world's widest customer base (**Essential Ant-Man**, anyone? And while I'm in a parenthesis, does anyone know if DC will ever do a paperback version of their **Archives** series? Man, the amount of those I'd buy if they weren't nearly forty nicker a pop. Praise be, that the **Plastic Man** volumes only come out once a year).

And then what do they go and do? They choose to carry advertising in their trades. Bad move. Bad, bad move. Let's just spell this out: a book is not a comic. A comic is as a magazine is: cheap. Disposable. Throwaway. A book is something different, something weightier in all senses. A book is to be kept and returned to again and again. A book does not carry advertising excepting a page of "By the same author" somewhere in the back. A book is meant to be free of such greed.

A very valid point indeed was made by a friend while we were discussing this matter. Advertising is of the moment. It shills for a product which is available now and, given the age of the target audience for the books carrying the ads, is fashionable now. In six months, those advertisements will be as out of date as N'Sync's last haircut. And as a result of this, the books which carry the adverts, books which are supposed to be longer-lived collections of previously ephemeral material, become as transitory as the periodicals they collect. Which in turn makes me wonder exactly how much faith Marvel actually have in their trade paperback programme, if they see the product as saleable for only a few months.

Even if tucked away in the back of the volume, advertising in a book is an absolute bloody disgrace. Selling advertising space in a book is an activity only ever considered by those for whom the soul is nothing but a commodity, and only executed by those who have already written a receipt. And if, at some time now or in the future, Marvel chooses to place advertising across a book in the manner it is placed across a periodical; if, at any time, I look into one of their trades and see an advertisement for a sugar-loaded soft drink or for the latest must-have pedal accessory *breaking the flow of story*, then I promise you, hand on heart, that I will find the man responsible for such barbarism and I will personally bite off his testicles.

That's only reasonable, surely?

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COMICS MILESTONES

Mike Kidson continues his exploration of key moments in the history of comicbooks

IT'S usual for comics to be discussed in terms of literary criticism, with the achievements of artists and writers being prioritised. But the mechanics of production have also played a highly important role in the history and development of the medium, with developments in printing technology having a major impact on it on numerous occasions. One of the historical ironies about comics is that a mechanical innovation which played a key role in starting the international comics boom at the end of the 19th century effectively released the medium from a straitjacket imposed on it by the limitations of the earliest printing presses, yet the medium continued to employ graphic styles which had developed in response to those limitations.

In the late 15th century the contrast between illustration of manuscripts and that of printed books was stark indeed. Monastic documents were often embellished lavishly in full colour, as were private prayer books owned by the wealthy, and various traditions of marginal illustration in coloured pencils also existed. Printed books offered stiff, often crude, black and white line art. This occurred because Gutenberg's printing press was designed to accommodate the only available relief image printing technique, woodcut. Woodcut could only sustain two values; negative - where the engraver had cut wood away from the surface so that it did not come into contact with the paper against which it was pressed, thus printing white; and positive - the areas not cut away from the block, left standing as lines which, when daubed with black ink, would press against the paper in the same manner as the typeface. Consequently, the invention of printing introduced an enormous change in illustrative methods, from the detailed to the simple and iconic

The soft plank surface used for woodcut until the late 18th century forced illustrators away from any kind of detailed "realism"; the knives used for engraving were too crude, and the plank too pliable, to allow much detail to be inserted. A very few painstaking craftsmen, notably those trained tyrannically by the German artist Albrecht Dürer, managed to achieve remarkable results, and in doing so arrived at a number of valuable iconic devices, such as use of cross-hatching to represent shadow and depth; but by the 1520s Dürer had really pushed woodcut to its limits, and from then on simplicity prevailed. In the 17th century, printers finally abandoned woodcut. Book buyers wanted more sophisticated illustrations than the medium could provide, so the trend shifted towards the use of metal engraving. This technique could not be used in tandem with the printing press; hence the practice of inserting illustrations on separate plates necessarily emerged, quite incidentally resulting in a physical separation between text and illustrations which remained unavoidable until the end of the 18th century. The notion that "proper" books don't have pictures on the same pages as the text, still prevalent today, derives from this mechanical accident.

Meanwhile, the woodcut remained in use for printing of ballad sheets, chapbooks, advertising flyers and other cheap, popular print media. As an illustrative mode it barely developed at all for two centuries – but its continued existence served to establish simple, iconic line art as the traditional style of cheap printed illustration. When in the late 18th century the technique of wood engraving emerged – carving not on the soft surface of the plank with a knife but on its hard end grain with metal engravers' tools – an explosion of popular printed media eventually resulted, reuniting pictures with text in cartoon magazines, miscellanies and newspapers. Yet, although much more shading and subtlety was easily achievable in a wood engraving than in a woodcut, the results remained black and white line art – and the artists in general retained the iconic devices associated with woodcut printing.

Only in the 1880s did it become possible to dispense with wood engravings and print any kind of image on paper. The major technical development which allowed this was the perfection of photographic typesetting; drawings could now be photographed, and the photographs transferred to light-sensitive blocks which could be inserted into the printing presses. Coloured reproduction of painted art was now possible; a new style of cartooning began to emerge, involving practitioners such as Phil May, whose light touch and impressionist approach to detail could not have been engraved into wood. On a less innovative, but perhaps just as influential, level, photosetting allowed Alfred Harmsworth to create the first of the modern British comics, **Comic Cuts**, by ordering an editor to cut and paste cartoons from other magazines, the pasted-up result being photographed for printing!

Yet, at the cheap popular level at which the late 19th century comics began, the by now 400 year old tradition of simple, iconic line art remained in force. Modern comics could have employed a wide range of artistic techniques from their very outset – but they stayed with the tried and tested techniques which originally emerged only because they were all that the earliest printing presses could cope with. It is only within the last 15 years that the comics have really begun to break away from the line art standard – and even painted comics often employ the techniques of iconic depiction employed and developed by line artists. For comics as we currently know them, the limitations of Gutenberg's printing press remain one of the most significant milestones of all.

In last issue's Milestones I mistakenly ascribed credit for the DC Thomson character Korky the Cat to Dudley Watkins; he was in fact created by James Crichton. My thanks to Phil Rushton for pointing out the error. BL

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THERE IS NO ESCAPE FROM THE DEADLINE OF TEMPTATION

Glenn Dakin came to public notice, along with Eddie Campbell, Phil Elliott and others, as part of the British Fast Fiction comics scene in the mid-1980s. For Harrier Comics he produced ***Paris, the Man of Plaster*** *with Steve Way. He also drew a variety of short strips which appeared in Harrier's* ***Gag!*** *anthology,* ***Escape***, ***Deadline***, *various Fantagraphics magazines and elsewhere. These short strips included* ***Temptation***, *about a hermit's battle of wits with the Devil, and* ***Abe***, *a strip about, well we'll come to that in a moment.*

He later worked with Elliott on ***The Man From Cancer*** *for Marvel UK, and on* ***Greenhouse Warriors*** *for Tundra. More recently he's probably best known to comics readers for his many walk-on appearances in Eddie Campbell's* ***Alec*** *stories.*

With Top Shelf Productions about to publish an ***Abe*** *collection,* ***Borderline****'s Jez Higgins met Glenn Dakin in a London bar ...*

BORDERLINE: I've seen Abe described in various places as veiled or romantic autobiography, but I'm not sure it was autobiographical to begin with.
Glenn Dakin: When it started out, it was kind of an adventure strip. It was set in the future; Captain Oblivion was a superhero and Abe was his private life. I found that as I carried along doing it, I became more and more interested just using it as a way of saying things about life in general. After a while I drifted into saying anything that came to my mind.

BL: Captain Oblivion wrestled more with his conscience that he did with any supervillains.
GD: It was supposed to be like that. I set out that he wouldn't be someone who went around fighting, but would think things through and think "what is the point of me doing this". He was supposed to be like one of these infuriating, arrogant kind-of... There was this period when all my favourite songwriters were people who weren't doing anything - John Lennon, Scott Walker, Bob Dylan - they just weren't doing anything. They were saying "I don't do my hits, and I don't do this".

I thought it would be good if you had a superhero who never really did anything. He just had a kind of attitude that life is important, and I'll talk about life, but I don't actually have to go out there and do what I'm famous for.

BL: But he wasn't satisfied with that, was he? He packed it all and got a job painting skyscrapers.
GD: He wanted to be in touch with ordinary life.

TEMPTATION
by Glenn Dakin
What are these horrible things?
A king erected them on the borders of his land to keep people away -
- because he was terrified they might discover what lay beyond...
and what did "lay beyond"?
absolutely nothing!
Yeh, I know a lot of people like that.

BL: Floating halfway up a skyscraper with a pot of paint?
GD: That is ordinary to me... (laughs) Strange sort of strands weave in from your own life. I remember during that period I was out of college; I didn't know what to do with my life. People were saying to me "you should go on and have a career, you should try to be

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For instance - You live with a girl who sings as she wanders round the house - and you enjoy listening to it.. but you tell her..
then, whenever she sings in the future, she cant help remembering what you said - maybe she's more self conscious - it spoils her singing
...admitting what you like - where you stand.. you're sort of in danger of breaking a spell.

successful". Captain Oblivion was a parallel to that. People were saying "you should do this, you should be saving the world", and he was just painting buildings, doing down to Earth things, drifting around coffee bars, arguing with his friends. At that stage in his life, that was all he either wanted to do, or was capable of doing.

BL: You were doing things, though; you weren't sat around doing nothing. In How To Be An Artist, Eddie Campbell paints you as a bit of a powerhouse, a bit of a dynamo. You seem to be the guy who keeps him on track.

GD: The first time I met Eddie, he was about to go to Australia for six months. By pure fluke, six months later, I went round to visit Paul and Peter at Escape and they said "Oh, Eddie's coming round in five minutes". It was amazing; I met him at the beginning and the end of that trip. That kind of strange cosmic coincidence, or whatever, seemed to put us on the same planet, and we were discussing all our thoughts, all our ideas about comics. From then on we were exchanging letters and our strips, certainly on a weekly basis. Every strip I ever drew, and every strip Eddie drew, we would always just send each other the pages as we were doing them. Photocopy them and write the letters on the back. For a few years, there we were exchanging ideas all the time. Not always saying "how great this is". I remember when I was first sending stuff, Eddie was saying "why are you doing this, you should be doing that". It wasn't all "I think you're great" and "I think you're great too". Sometime we'd be driving each other up the wall. "What are you wasting your time doing this new stuff, you should be doing Temptation. You should be turning that into a strip like Charlie Brown or something. That should be your major work". Then a couple of weeks later, I'd do something else, and Eddie'd be "forget Temptation..."

BL: You did seem to be firing out ideas all over the place: Temptation, Paris, Introspectre. Seemed like hundreds and hundreds of little one page, two pagers that you or Phil Elliott drew.
GD: It was a very lively time. We were all influencing each other, and encouraging each other. Before, I was always told that comics was a pretty rubbish thing to be doing. Suddenly I met this group of people who thought they were great. Eddie would say: "Have you seen this latest strip Phil's done, he's really captured this", and we'd find out that someone up North, John Bagnell or Ed Pinsent, had done something interesting. Or Woodrow Phoenix - he was Trevs then - he's so cool, he's got studio technique, which I didn't have. It was really exciting. And we would be thinking "Hey look, I could do this with Trevs", and then Eddie and I would be wanting to get stuck into our main strips - with me it was Abe, and with him it was Alec. If I saw a great Alec strip, which I did very often, it would inspire me to capture my deepest feelings in Abe. Although a lot of stuff was humorous, I was really feeling deeply about some of the strange philosophical ideas in there.

"...Suddenly I met this group of people who thought they were great."

BL: At what point then, did Captain Oblivion stop being Captain Oblivion and start being Abe, and Abe start being Glenn?
GD: It happened so gradually. I kept going back and pulling Captain Oblivion out of the hat, when everyone thought I'd got bored of him. I would suddenly think it be nice to now do a Captain Oblivion story, because things had moved on. Around 87 or 88, I did a Captain Oblivion comic for Harrier. It was just a Captain Oblivion adventure, and that harkened back to stuff I'd been doing four years before. He never completely evolved.

BL: You never thought of leaving Abe behind and drawing Glenn?
GD: Ah, I did, but it never seemed to work. Before I ever met Eddie Campbell, I thought it would be nice to meet him at one of these comic things, but how will I know it's him? Of course, there looming was this very large lighthouse-like object that looked exactly like Alec, so instantly I knew it was him. Other people would draw themselves in their strips too. I always thought perhaps I should drop Abe and draw me, but I never quite got there.

BL: Eddie has never made any secret that he was Alec, but there's

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GLEN
MEET ABE! 6
DAKIN
This is Abraham Rat, fun-loving child of the future...
ME FUN
Abe has one small problem with the world...
It stinks!
He lives in the far-flung future- a time when man has become so advanced, he lives in funny-looking cities like this...
COOL!
Abe is also the far-out superhero- CAPTAIN OBLIVION
I PUNCH creeps!
Amongst his deadly enemies are millionaire miles long...
...the Flying Psychiatrist
and Doctor DEEPEND!
Frankly I'm Superb!
Why won't you lie down, Captain?
You will be disposed of at once!
At least, that's what I would have told you when I invented him when I was 14...
As I got older, the other cartoon creations of my youth disappeared.
But Abe would not go away.....
Dipped Dinosaur
To you, Bob
Thanks Dave
Hans
Rilsey Rangers

obviously some storytelling advantage to having a fictionalised version of themselves.
GD: In his book, one whole page was a letter I wrote him, and he copied my handwriting so it looks like my letter. I didn't even notice; he had to point it out, that he'd changed it to "Dear Alec" instead of "Dear Eddie". I just accept Alec as Eddie. They are one and the same thing. Abe is at times a long way away from me. He doesn't look like me; he doesn't live in the same world as me. I'm just completely free ranging about it - sometimes I set him in the future; sometime he's in the Greek Islands or travelling in Finland. Those are exact depictions of what happened to me, except that the character is Abe. Loads of the people in those books exist; Abe is almost the only person who doesn't exist.

BL: In those "straight" autobiographical strips, you haven't fictionalised the other people.
GD: Some I do, and some I don't. Sometimes I just come out and say who they are, and sometimes I create an identity for them. You might do that to slightly disguise them, or to be fair to them. At that stage in my life, that person represented something, but you don't want to say that "Joe Bloggs was a pain in the arse". It might upset them, or not be fair to what they're like now. That way, you're kind of covered, and it probably prevents the odd punch on the nose.

> *"...Joe Bloggs was a pain in the arse."*

BL: You started drawing Abe strips, what, 20 years ago?
GD: I began when I was at school; I was about 14; that would have been about 1974. It was really a long time ago. I've done this little intro for the book, which explains it. I invented it as a superhero strip with all these mad enemies. I wanted him to have this attitudy secret-identity as a kind of opinionated grumpy teenager of the future, who found everything annoying about this sophisticated future world he lived in.

BL: You can see some of that in Abe, but he never quite carries it off. His posing is kind of transparent, isn't it? He's not happy with himself for doing it.
GD: What do you mean?

BL: There's a kind of melancholy about him. There's a melancholy about a lot of your work.
GD: He's not attitudy, like a 'cool American teenager' kind of attitudy; there's a lot more sadness. He's quite optimistic though; he's hoping for things to be better. He's not just putting things down.

BL: But he doesn't know quite what to do to make things happier?
GD: No, he sort of wanders around trying to discover something new. I did a strip once, which just ended up with Abe delivering the strip to whoever it was. The person says "Less questions and more answers" and Abe gets thrown out. That kind of summed up an awful lot of what he did; he wanders around asking "Why this?" and wondering "Why can't this be better, why does life have to be like this?" There's a lot of him seeking or questioning, wanting things to be better.

BL: In Temptation, there's a melancholy there too. The devil knows he's not going to tempt the hermit, and the hermit is resigned to fending off these attempts. They know their roles. Greenhouse Warriors had a melancholic feel too – well, eco-disaster is more than melancholic - but there's that feeling underneath.
GD: Funnily enough, I've been looking at GW again this week - I was thinking of trying to get it off the ground as an animation. There is a lot of simple funny stuff in GW. The characters are upbeat, but there's a backwash of gloom, or menace, undercutting it.

BL: They're all trying desperately trying to be

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You see the DHSS were wondering if.. well.. if you were.. umm
WHAT?
Working as 'Captain Oblivion' and still claiming benefit in your secret identity..
ah

happy, but there's something not quite right.
GD: I suppose that's true. It gives it a bit of tension. If they were all trying to be happy and were, it would be sickening.

BL: There's a two-page backup, The Vicar of St Voix, which is the archetypal Glenn Dakin strip. There's this vicar who everyone thinks is happy because he has this pelican he takes everywhere with him, but actually the pelican is a terrible burden to him.
GD: The only reason he carries it around is that he's hoping that somewhere along the line, the pelican will find something more interesting and free him. I was incredibly lucky that Phil Elliott drew all those things for me. It's very funny actually; we did this story - this is another example of the melancholy which comes out in my work. I stayed with Eddie Campbell the first time I went to Australia. I was really quite freaked out by how weird it was in Queensland, and I did a three-page strip about staying with Eddie. I didn't want to draw it myself, and I asked Phil Elliott to draw it up. I didn't even ask him to draw the characters as me and Eddie, but he did, more or less. I didn't really know what was going to happen to it, and on a long shot, Phil sent it in to Taboo. It actually ended up in this horror anthology. All the other stories were murders and killings, and there was this story about me on holiday at Eddie Campbell's house.

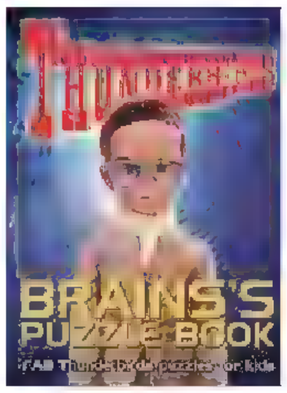
BL: When you write, are you aware of that tone you've established? Do you find drawing easy?
GD: I find... it depends what I'm drawing. There are certain things I love drawing, but it isn't easy in the sense that it's rather intense. I always had this weird superstition when I was drawing Abe, that if I thought about it too much, or planned it too much, I wouldn't be able to do it.

BL: You don't want to spend that energy on something that's not a lasting point.
GD: I think that's fair. If I was doing something merely to be funny, I would hardly think it was worth it. I know that sounds terrible. But if I can convince myself that there's a deep or mysterious meaning or feeling lurking underneath, then it's worth doing. Having said that, if it's a job... I have this strip Robot Crusoe in the *Funday Times*. That's a job; they pay me to do it every week; I just draw that up in really simple clear line.

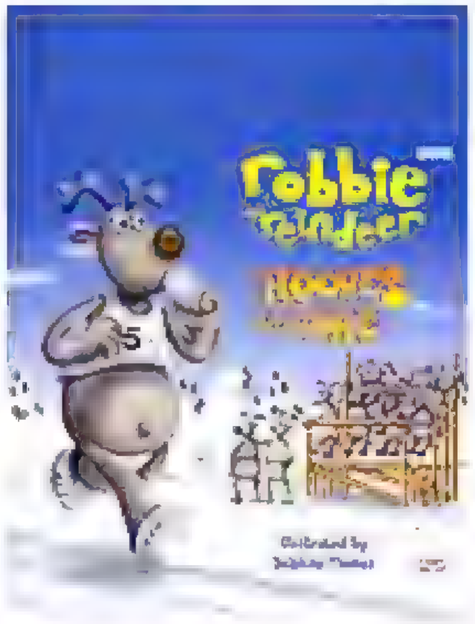
> *"...there was this story about me on holiday at Eddie Campbell's house..."*

BL: You also did the adaptation of the BBC's children's programme Robbie the Reindeer *...*
GD: That was just a job, but even after I did it, it was very heavily edited. I wouldn't point to that as an example of my work.

BL: You weren't tempted to make it a bit more serious?
GD: No... I wouldn't have dared... It was a Richard Curtis script; I would have been booed out of the BBC if I'd tried to introduce my own agenda. Children up and down the country would have been crying on Christmas morning. Jobs like that, you do what they want or they get someone else in. I quite like having a mixture of jobs in front of me. You can't do these idealistic things all the time, or they go strangely sour if you do them all the time. If you try too hard to be always idealistic, something kind of backfires on you. I think you need a couple of these cynical projects out there to add some mustard to your pen.



As well as cutting edge cartoons, Dakin's done the odd Thunderbirds book, a few issues of the Marvel title, ClanDestine, and something to do with Robbie Williams...



BL: You describe Abe as "your life's work". Is this book "the complete Abe", or is there more? Do you have that need?
GD: In theory, I could be drawing Abe at any time. I always have the idea that soon I'm going to do some more. But I never quite know, I have to wait for the really strong feeling, that there's a sea change in my life, or in my heart or something...
[Glenn's girlfriend Sara is about to have a baby, so there is one coming up.]

GD: You never know. Having the baby, I might suddenly start doing these strips like Eddie, of sitting at home. Your child comes in and says something funny to you, and you think "I must do a comic about

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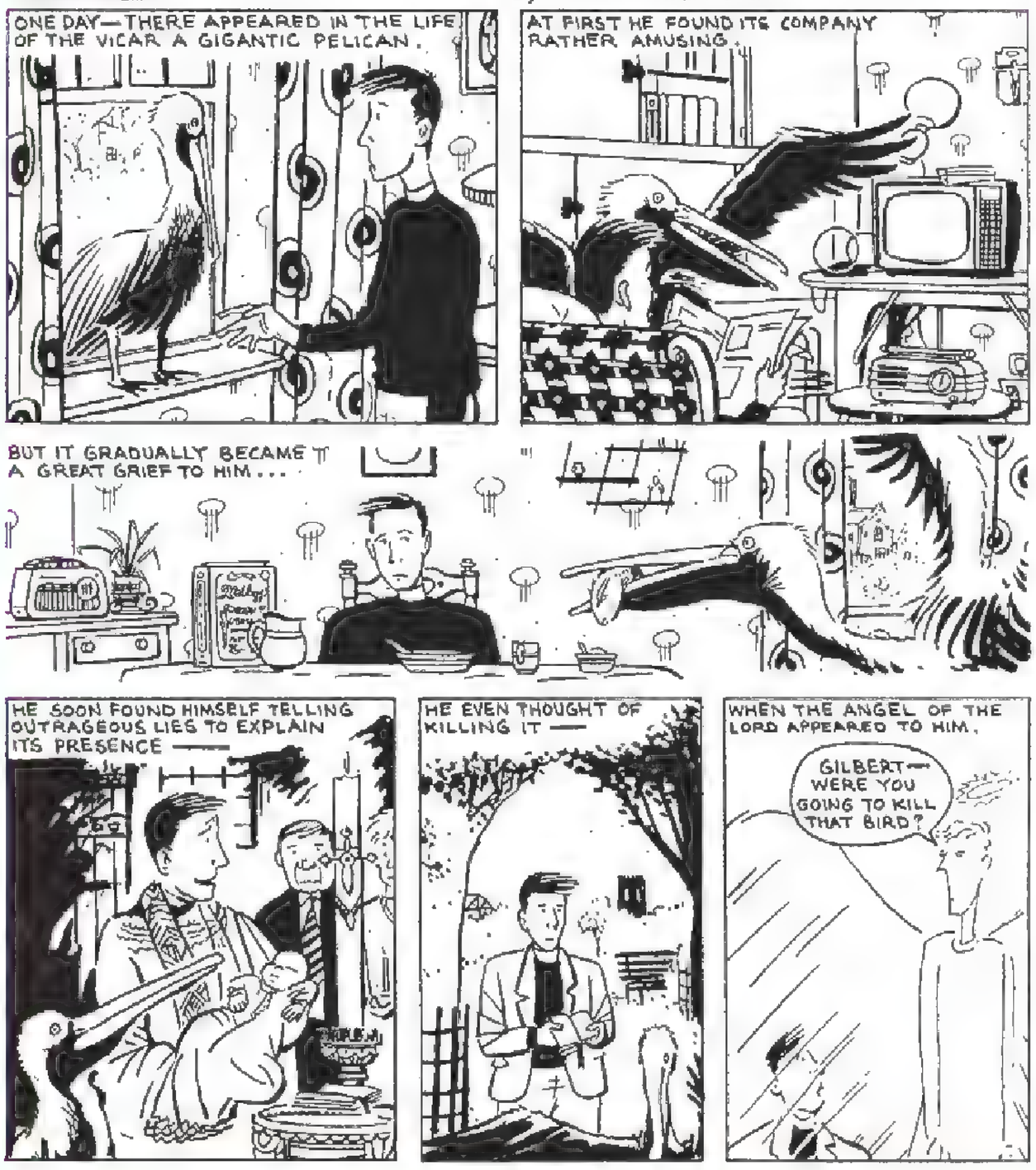
The Vicar of St Voix

By GLENN DAKIN and PHIL ELLIOTT


ONE DAY—THERE APPEARED IN THE LIFE OF THE VICAR A GIGANTIC PELICAN.
AT FIRST HE FOUND ITS COMPANY RATHER AMUSING.
BUT IT GRADUALLY BECAME A GREAT GRIEF TO HIM...
HE SOON FOUND HIMSELF TELLING OUTRAGEOUS LIES TO EXPLAIN ITS PRESENCE —
HE EVEN THOUGHT OF KILLING IT —
WHEN THE ANGEL OF THE LORD APPEARED TO HIM.
GILBERT— WERE YOU GOING TO KILL THAT BIRD?

this; my child has said something funny". You never know, I'll probably start doing that. Sickening the world around me.

The Abe book really does collect the Abe I did from 1983 through to today, because I did a new strip for it. There's loads of stuff that's never been seen; some that I showed to about five people; some that got into print in Escape, Deadline, Fantagraphics things, Harrier, but there's a whole load of some of my favourite things that have only been seen by a few people. There's some poetic ones, and experimental ones. There's an interesting mish-mash of things.

> *"...Kind of my downfall, always trying to do new things."*

BL: And these are presented in chronological order?
GD: Yes, as far as possible. All the two pagers are going on spreads, so we might have to cheat a bit. Eddie's acting as a kind of unofficial editor, because he's got loads of copies of my stuff and he's better at knowing the order I did it in than I am.

BL: You're obviously really excited about this.
GD: Oh yeah, it means an awful lot to me. I'd kind of forgotten about Abe for a while, because I'd been writing children's novels and things, and trying other stuff. Kind of my downfall, always trying to do new things.

BL: There was a Temptation collection published by Penguin. That was '87-'88?
GD: '91

BL : When graphic novels were the next big thing. You didn't try then to get Abe published as a collection?
GD: No, I've never ever tried to get Abe published as a collection.

BL: So how did this come about?
GD: Mainly through Tom Hart suggesting it. He's always been fond of my work, and he went around telling people about it. Also there's the connection with Eddie, who knows Chris Staros at Top Shelf. The mixture of Tom Hart putting my name out there and saying "He's an influence" and Eddie backing it up, and Dylan Horrocks. Those guys have done me a good turn. I really wasn't pushing Abe at all. It seemed backwards of me to be trying to flog work from 10 years ago, when now I'm really very deeply involved in other projects. It's great for me that suddenly Top Shelf said "Do you want to do this book?" and I just thought "What a fantastic idea". Now, I'm so pleased they're doing it, I think I'm an idiot for not doing it before.

BL: Do you feel different about the work now? There you were, an underground hero, and suddenly there's a whole new audience who aren't familiar with you. Are you nervous about it?
GD: I've got no idea how it's going to work. That's why we didn't call it "The Collected Abe", because that won't mean much to many people. We called it Wrong, For All The Right Reasons, and there's a kind of reflective dark image of Abe on the cover, as if he's pondering deeply as to where his life has gone horribly wrong. It might strike a chord with people. Although it started out as science fiction adventures and wacky villains, somewhere along the line, an awful lot of them are reflections on life.

BL: You're not embarrassed about the

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superhero element to it?
GD: Not in the least. I like superhero comics anyway. I like sixties superhero comics, basically. I don't see it as something to be embarrassed about - if you read it, it's a spoof; a satire of normal superhero comics. I find that kind of thing funny. Captain Oblivion isn't going to be regarded as a "real" superhero by anybody, but it makes it kind of friendly and approachable. It's partly adventure story and part reflective autobiography. You think I should be embarrassed?
(Laughs)

BL: No, I just wondered. Comics artists are often criticised for writing comics that comics readers will like. A superhero parody is exactly that kind of thing. If you're appealing to a general audience, isn't there a pressure to ditch all that stuff and give them the straight dope?
GD: No, I'm not really like that. In some of the most serious stuff I've done, I've deliberately dropped in panels that are really comicsy; really silly. I like to blend the whole thing together.

Perhaps that's why I never turned Abe into Glenn Dakin and said "This is my life". I love comics; I like the playfulness. I love the fact that, halfway through a "deep and meaningful" story, I can dive off and use one of my other characters, like Space Face or Paris, The Man Of Plaster. It's kind of like what you do with music. You can like a group like the Beach Boys; one minute they'll be singing something philosophical, and then they'll be singing about girls. It's just in the music and in the voices. Bob Dylan too; one of his songs will be a playful, rollicking roller-coaster of nonsense, and you'll know in the tone of voice that this one is more playful. You can do that in comics, you can slip into more playful characters, more funny dialogue, and then suddenly slip back into a more loaded emotional tone. That probably sounds like a mad ramble.

BL: Let's say this book sells a truckload, would you put together another?
GD: It would be nice to do an American edition of Temptation. It's very George Herriman and Johnny Hart-inspired. If you look at the way the jokes are delivered, an awful lot of that I picked up from Johnny Hart, reading The Wizard Of Id and BC. An awful lot is obviously Herriman inspired. I think, I hope, it would go down well in America. That would be fun. It's a shot in the dark; I don't know what will happen.

> *"...That probably sounds like a mad ramble."*

BL: You haven't published anything for a while. Are you still drawing comics and stashing them under the bed, or do you need an audience?
GD: For the last few years I've been creating children's storybooks and children's novels. I went through a long period of writing songs instead of comics. That's one of the reasons I stopped doing Abe, because I got into singing and things. So it comes out in different avenues. Last year, I wrote three short children's novels, all humorous fantasy, typical Glenn Dakin material, but aimed at 8 to 11 year olds. I don't have any energy to be creating comics that nobody is seeing. I would love to do more comics though - I really enjoyed doing the intro strip for the book. It was like suddenly being back on that planet where I know what I'm doing.

Abe, Wrong for all the Right Reasons is now available in the shops, or direct from TopShelf Comix at www.topshelfcomix.com/

BL

NOT I, SIR.
DO NOT FORGET.
BUT THE ANGEL OF THE LORD SAID "DO NOT FORGET THAT I AM THE ANGEL OF THE LORD AND THAT I CAN SEE INTO THE HEARTS AND MINDS OF MEN."
SO THE VICAR SAID "WHAT CAN I DO?
THE ONLY THING YOU CAN DO IS TO FIND THIS PELICAN SOMETHING MORE INTERESTING IN LIFE THAN YOUR OWN GOOD SELF.
AND SO THEY WENT TO MANY PLACES TOGETHER.
CONSTANT COMPANIONS AT CONCERTS, ZOOS AND GALLERIES.
THE SUPERFICIAL WORLD SAW THEM AS GREAT FRIENDS.
ONLY THE ANGEL OF THE LORD KNEW THE TRUTH.

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BRAZIL, BRAZIL
INDEPENDENT VOICES

International Comics investigator Phil Hall concludes his examination of the Brazilian comicbook industry with the independent and small press gang and discovers that there's a lot of similarities between Brazil and the United States...

WHEN you promise a three-part article on a nation's comics industry and it appears, on the surface, to be dominated by two men - Mauricio de Sousa's multi-million dollar comics company, which blows the opposition out of the water, and political cartoonist Ziraldo - you get a bit stuck on who to write your third part about without it becoming something of an anti-climax.

As I set out on my own personal voyage of Brazilian comics discovery back in 1997, I expected to find something not too dissimilar to the US comics industry. After all the likes of Mike Deodato Jr., Al Rio, Mozart Couto, Cliff Richards, Ed Benes and Joe Bennett all originate from Brazil, so I concluded that it'd be full of Portuguese-speaking, buxom superheroines all drawn in that dynamic trademark Mike Deodato Jr. way. Of course, the discovery that **Mônica's Gang** and its ten spinoff comics sold to the tune of over 4 million copies per week rather set me aback. It was that discovery five years ago that suddenly turned me onto the rest of the world and the comics it produces (and ultimately to doing this magazine!).

I sat down a couple of months ago and decided that the only way to finish my Brazil feature was to look at its independent and small press scene. My eyes were further opened when I discovered that what I call "small press" (as an ignorant Brit) and what the rest of the world call "small press" are different beasts. What's more, I discovered that there was so much going on in Brazil and South America that a final single part might not do it justice. I conducted a couple of small interviews, persevered with Alta Vista's Babelfish translator to work out roughly what was being talked about on some of the most adventurous and fascinating web sites I've ever seen, and still I couldn't see the wood for the trees. Every time I seemed to be coming to a logical conclusion, one of my new friends would pop up and say "Don't forget Julio Shimamoto" or "Edgar Vasquez! Don't forget Edgar Vasquez." One contact said, "If you're doing anything on Brazil you have to talk to Fabio Zimbres". So I scrapped everything and started again...

Of course the first thing that any English speaking comics fan will notice is that it's all in a foreign tongue – I wonder if that immediately kills 90% of the potential interest? The next thing that many readers of **Borderline** will notice is that, with the exception of Emir Ribeiro's **Velta**, there's hardly a superhero in sight (and we've covered Emir's work already in great detail in #5).

What follows is, hopefully, something of a beginners' guide to Brazilian independent comics; no more than that, because if you scratch at the surface for too long you can get lost in a tidal wave of comics creators - ranging from 14 to 84 - all with something to say and show.

O Clube • Autor: Edgar Vasquez
EDGAR VASQUES
O CLUBE
QUEM FOI?
CHANCE?
McNABB?
ARIAS?
ANTHONY?
SARGENT?
JARVIS!
YES, SIR!
DIABO! O ULTRAJE É SÉRIO O MORDOMO!
O FAXINA QUE SOBROU AQUILO EM PLENO SALÃO DO RUMBLE
ARIAS, SENHOR...
OU ISSO
NÃO SEI, NÃO É? FOI NA SUA CABEÇA EU JÁ ESTAVA FUGINDO NAS MONTANHAS DO ALASKA, ANTIGAS...
ARIAS, SERIOS
OU ISSO!
FOI ASSIM QUE EU PERDI UM NOME RESPEITADO!
SIR! BOURBON, LORD CENTURY.
VOCÊ SABE QUAL O VALOR DE UMA TAL PARA SE FAZER UMA APOSTA?
NO MEIO DOS DANÇARINOS NO KLONDIKE, 80% MORRERAM ZOADOS POR CAUSA DOS PÉS, ESPECIALMENTE FAMINTOS E EU... HAHAHA!
HAIS, UM FARINA.
ARIAS, LORD CENTURY.
OU ISSO
LÁ EU APRENDI QUE O MELHOR METAL PARA UMA BOA APOSTA É O OURO. ATRÁS DE TUDO É A TODOS.
ISSO FOI ROUBADO NÃO ACHA, ARIAS?
AQUELE ALI DEVE TER CONFIANÇA NUM PRODUTO QUE SE CHAMA LORD CENTURY.
O NOME É CENTURY!
OU ISSO
4
Made in Brasil Quadrinhos 3 • Nov. 2000

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A HISTORY OF THE BRAZILIAN COMICS PUBLISHING SCENE

(With thanks to Fabio Zimbres!)
BRAZIL'S comic publishing history sounds pretty familiar – two large magazine publishing combines dominating the field in the '60s and '70s, (focussing on US reprints) with one (Globo) gradually superseding the older one (Abril). Sounds like Marvel and DC, doesn't it? But where's the Jack Kirby? Well, the local comics superstar, Mauricio de Sousa, went from one to the other, before going independent.

As the comics industry contracted worldwide, MSP (de Sousa's company) consolidated, taking over the main body of professionally produced comics. This left very few avenues for Brazilian comics creators to get their work published. Alternative publishers of local material sprang up during the 1980s, Fantagraphics/**Raw** style.

In the late 1990s the market fragmented. The money-spinning US and manga reprint licenses were farmed out between newer, smaller companies. Local professionals' material began to be pushed towards the bookshops as a new outlet for editions. The small press sprang up in the early 1990s and continues to thrive at a very local level. Porto Alegre is a major centre of activity, regarded as one of the likeliest places for the economic resurgence of Brazil as it is building itself a reputation as an Internet-friendly major city.

BREAKDOWN

Large publishers

MSP – Mauricio de Sousa's multi-million dollar publishing empire, with the top 11 selling comic books in the country! This man and his company are an institution in Brazil and he has been rightly honoured for his work on numerous occasions.

Abril – the big comics publisher in the 70s and 80s, publishing Marvel, DC, and Disney translations, and Mauricio De Sousa comics (although he left them in the 80s). By the early 90s they'd also lost the Marvel/DC/Dark Horse licences, and subsequently are no longer that big (or interested) in comics. They're successful publishers of a full range of popular magazines, though.

Globo – a newcomer to comics in the '80s; ambitious enough to lure Mauricio de Sousa from Abril, in the 90s they started publishing DC translations and local Disney material. They too publish a full range of popular magazines.

Both Abril and Globo have tended to focus on US comics reprints, not Brazilian material (with the major exception being de Sousa). The only local comics they've handled have been some local Disney material and comics based on local TV and pop stars.

Smaller publishers – 70s & 80s

While Abril and Globo had the big sales at that time, smaller houses were putting out Brazilian material in a number of genres: Sex comics; Horror comics; Humour comics (e.g. **O Pasquim**); Newspaper strips. Such smaller publishers had considerable commercial success and good distribution, but not on the level of Abril or Globo (to extend the US analogy, perhaps they may be compared with Charlton or Eclipse Comics).

Smaller publishers – mid 80s and early 90s

Newspaper cartoonist Angeli, who did a very popular humorous strip named *Angeli* in the bestselling Brazilian newspaper, **Folha de Sao Paulo,** started **Chiclete Con Banana**. **CCB** was a successful "self-publishing" venture – originally it contained reprints of the *Angeli* strip and new material by him, but later it became a venue for a new generation of Brazilian cartoonists and comics artists - it also expanded to include a line of titles, including **Circo** (Brazilian and foreign material, more serious than the funnies in CCB) and a line of "classic" reprint books. (For that US point of reference again, I think we're talking about something roughly equivalent to Fantagraphics or maybe **Raw**.)

The 1990s: Translated US/Japanese comics

A major market shift occurred when Abril and Globo lost the US comics licences, which have since been farmed out among various new, smaller, comics-

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dedicated publishers. Manga has become incredibly popular - and both Abril and Globo missed the boat when they were failed to pick these licenses up. The following publishers all specialise in either Manga (m) or US reprints (u): Conrad (m), JBC (m), Brainstorm (u), Mithos (u), Escala (u). Escala also puts out some Brazilian comics on the newsstands.

Brazilian comics

The main recent sales direction for Brazilian comics has been not the newsstands but the book market. Of the above named publishers, Conrad is also active in this market, together with Via Lettera and Opera Graphica. All three also put translated trade paperbacks into the bookshops. Distribution is good, sales are significant. Angeli's material appears this way these days.

Small press

This is essentially the same as small press everywhere else in the world. Publishers like Fabio Zimbres and Rodnério Rosa put out their comics, self-financed, in limited print runs which are distributed informally or through a small distribution chain run by Opera Graphica. Some Brazilian big names go to the small press for its editorial freedom, for example Allan Sieber and Lourenço Mutarelli.

Graphar/Grafar

This is the local equivalent of the UK's Society of Strip Illustrators. It mounts exhibitions and events, sometimes with local municipal and even federal government financial backing. It has a reputation for being "lazy" and bureaucratic, but in a country that is still regarded as Third World, there is *some* kind of support from the government for comics – something you rarely see in the UK or USA, but find all over Europe. Comic books, however much they may be struggling on an economic footing in Brazil, are still regarded as an important art form.

Conclusion

There is little money to be made for independent creators in Brazil. The franchises have taken over the money end of the market and **Spider-Man**, **Superman**, **Buffy** and **Spawn** have infiltrated the South American continent. But these are still insignificant sellers when compared to MSP's **Monica's Gang** and friends.

Many artists set their sights on breaking into the US market, and Mike Deodato Jr. has become as well respected in his homeland as Mauricio De Sousa or Ziraldo or Shimamoto, while Joe Bennett and Ed Benes are waiting in the wings. The US means guaranteed food on the table and for some a run on a Marvel title can be the difference between the rest of your life in poverty or having a future.

GOSTE OU NÃO DE GALINHA, DEVERÁ MANIFESTAR SURPRESA E SATISFAÇÃO DESDE A PRIMEIRA ATÉ A ÚLTIMA QUE TIVER DE COMER NESTA CIDADE!

The heartbreaking thing about Brazil is that it's just like the rest of the world – First, Second or Third world, the indigenous comics industries all follow similar patterns, all have the same physical infrastructure and all are suffering from the worldwide publishing recession. Fortunately, what these people bring with them when they do crack the western market is something a little bit different. Something fresh, new and not old and worn like so many of today's Marvel and DC comics.

What is needed more than anything else is for an innovative publisher in Europe or even the UK to look into acquiring the rights to some of the best Brazilian comics produced and translating them for the rest of the world. Books like Andrè Diniz's **Fawcett**, Berardi & Millazzo's **Ken Parker: Um Principe Paranorma**, Júlio Shimamoto's erotic classic **Volúpia**, Allan Sieber's **Últimas Palavras** and if something weird and superhero-ish is *really* required, how about **Dimensão Z** by Fido Nesti?

To be fair, Brazil probably isn't that much different from any comic producing country – it has its good and it has its bad. It mirrors the US in many ways, but the independence of their independents is admirable. This is a poor country that can produce a high quality end product so consistently and in such a way that it makes the US and, especially, the UK look slow and behindhand.

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A SELECTIVE WHO'S WHO OF BRAZILIAN COMICS CREATORS

JUST who are the stars of the Brazilian independent scene? The list is far too long to do them all justice, so we asked a couple of the prominent indy publishers in Brazil for their opinions.

Rodnério Rosa, publisher of **Made In Brasil Quadrinhos**, selected a number of the people he publishes:

*Edgar Vasques (**O Clube**)*
Edgar is a well-known comics and cartooning professional in Brazil. For the next issue of **Made In Brasil Quadrinhos** he's contributed a cartoon that is going to be exhibited with several others at the World Social Forum. His work has been published often over the years. His last comicbook, **Sottovoce – Death Whispers**, has received good reviews. He's won lots of prizes both in and outside this country.

☛*Julio Shimamoto (**El Diablo**)*
Shima is regarded as a comics master in Brazil. It's thanks to him that many people, like myself, are trying to produce mature comics. He is my comics mentor and a good critic of my work, always looking to help me improve. It's a curious thing – techniques Frank Miller makes use of in **Sin City**, Shima was already using in the 70s. It's obvious Miller never heard of Shima, though, since Brazilian comics do not reach the US like their comics reach us.

☛*Jerri Dias & Walter Júnior* (**O Homem**)
Jerri Dias is a scriptwriter and filmmaker. His first film won all the prizes in the 8 mm category at the Latin American Gramado Film Festival in 1999.

Walter Júnior & Jack Kaminski are gifted artists but not very well known in Brazil. However, they've received comics prizes wherever they've exhibited their work.

☛*Santiago*
He is considered by international critics to be one of the greatest cartoonists worldwide. He's won dozens of prizes in and out of the country. Lately he appears in contests as a guest, part of the jury - so as not to scare away the competitors!

☛*André Lima*
André is a newcomer, discovered through our site - www.studiodigital.cjb.net - last year. He's graduating in journalism and he is an artist who uses his skills to participate in comics and art contests. He's a promising talent who will be back in **MIB #5**.

☛Fabio Zimbres is the publisher of Mini Tonto Comics – these are a selection of minicomics with small but sold out print runs. His nominees are:

☛*Allan Sieber*:
From Porto Alegre, he used to edit his own comic **Gloria, Gloria, Aleluia!** He is also doing animated cartoons and is now living in Rio de Janeiro. He has done short animations which have received some recognition: *Deus é Pai* won several awards in Brazil and Portugal and was distributed together with Kevin Smith's film *Dogma*. He also publishes a monthly strip in the newspaper **Folha de São Paulo**.

☛*Eduardo Oliveira*
Also from Porto Alegre, he's an illustrator for the city's biggest daily newspaper - **Zero Hora** - and has collaborated on **Dundum** (an alternative comic from Porto Alegre from the early 90s), **Animal** [Zimbres own anthology magazine] and others.

☛*Jaca*
Another Porto Alegre resident, he's also an illustrator, one of the best of his generation. He has worked for a series of newspapers in Porto Alegre and São Paulo and started doing comics in **Dundum**. He usually works with scripts done by others but since his Mini Tonto debuted he's been writing his own comics.

☛*MZK*
From São Paulo, he's published various fanzines and collaborated with all sorts of magazines. His work is zany surrealistic cheap pop world kind of stuff, done with an ingenious and simple style.

☛Schiavon
He's another São Paulo native who published his first comics in **Animal** and has scandalized readers ever since with his porno apocalyptic work.

☛*Fido Nesti*
A São Paulo based artist who published his own fanzine called **Heroína** and caught my eye; I really don't know much about him but he works as an illustrator and has bags of potential.

☛*Sylvio Ayala*
A rebel from Porto Alegre, he has always worked with fanzines and alternative culture, I have known him since the days I used to edit **Animal,** through the publications he sent me. His favourite themes are legalizing pot and Brazilian street fighting (Capoeira).

☛*Guazzelli*
One of the best artists of his generation – a great lover of comics though he rarely dedicates his time to it. From Porto Alegre, he edited his own publication in the 80s - **Kamikaze** - and

PRETO NO BRANCO©
É VERDADE! EU ERA UM SUCESSO NOS ANOS SESSENTA! TODOS VIAM MINHA SÉRIE! A LASSIE ERA UM LIXO COMPARADA COMIGO!
HUM.

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Buc collection, which spotlights illustrations by various illustrators from Argentina and other South American and Latin American countries.
☛*Lourenço Mutarelli*
Hailing from São Paulo, he managed to create a name for himself with dark autobiographical and poetic stories which he has published in album form since the early 90s. In a country where most cartoonists deal with humour and mostly in short stories or daily strips, this is quite a feat. His current project is a series of albums with a hard-boiled detective kind of story that he manages to infuse with his own personal view.
☛*Fabio Zimbres*
Originally from São Paulo, currently living in Porto Alegre. Editor of **Animal** (with friends Priscila Farias, Newton Foot, Rogério de Campos and Celso Singo), collaborated in **Chiclete com Banana**, **Folha de São Paulo** (a daily strip, *Vida Boa*) and other publications from outside of Brazil: **Lapiz Japones**, **Comix 2000**, **Que Suerte**, **Rhodium Revulsif** and others [including, we hope, **Borderline**].
collaborated on **Animal**, **Dundum**, **Mil Perigos** and some foreign comics like Argentina's **Fierro** and Spain's **Medios Revueltos**. His book is an account of a trip he took to Puerto Rico.
☛*Elenio Pico*
The first foreign author to work for **Edições Tonto**. He's from Buenos Aires, Argentina and is part of the Comuna del Lapiz Japones, responsible for the massive anthology **Lapiz Japones** which presented most of the alternative cartoonists now working in Argentina. Now living in Barcelona, Spain, he is the creator and editor of the **Colorin**

MADE IN BRAZIL COMICS – 10 YEARS 4 ISSUES

RODNÉRIO Rosa's self-published comic is quite a phenomenon, compared to the comics most UK and US readers are used to. Made in Brasil Quadrinhos is 36 pages long, with glossy full colour covers, colour inserts, a design sense that puts most Marvel and DC comics to shame and a style that many black and white independent publishers in the First World should be paying attention to.

I spoke to Rod (aka Rudy) about his comic and his work:

BL: How long have you been producing Made in Brasil Quadrinhos?
RR: The first issue came out in 1990, a very amateur job, and the second in 1991. Then there was this huge gap [due to] lack of money. The money for the first issue came from me and two other friends, Jerri Dias and Drégus. So now, ten years later, MIB is back...

BL: How many copies are printed, or what are sales like?
RR: The third issue came out on April 2001 with 1000 copies paid for from my own pocket. The fourth issue is going to come out during the 2nd World Social Forum. This time it will have 4000 copies, thanks to some government sponsorship. Next issue (#5) will probably come out at the end of May with the regular 1000 copies.

It doesn't sell enough. Doesn't pay for itself. We even have good distribution, but the general public is now looking for manga and superheroes. Besides, there are less and less mature comics readers in Brazil now.

When the first issue came out, we intended to keep it bimonthly. When the second one came, we had no idea about the next one. I hope to keep it bimonthly or quarterly from now on. Actually, MIB will go on until my money runs out!

BL: What are your hopes for Made in Brasil Quadrinhos in the future? Do you want to become a professional comics person?
RR: My hope is to increase the quality level of the art and text more and more, looking to reach readers who like visual literature. At this moment I'm already publishing professionals like Edgar Vasquez, Santiago, Bier and others. And there are more coming...

BL: What are your own personal favourite comics?
RR: That is a tough question! I like too many. Those I can think of right now are Lourenço Mutarelli's comics (he's Brazilian), Neil Gaiman's Sandman, Alan Moore's Watchmen and V for Vendetta, the Incal series by Moebius and Jodorowski, Akira, Lone Wolf and Cub, Sottovoce by Edgar Vasquez, and Frank Miller's Sin City series. I don't follow regular comics like X-Men or Batman. I don't like most of the superhero comics and manga stuff that is currently coming out.

BL: Why do you call yourself "Rudy" on your artwork?
RR: Well, that's crazy! My name is Rodnério, but my friends call me Rudi, Rod or Rodi. I was never a cartoonist but then at the 1st World

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Social Forum I was invited to do one. I signed it as "Rudy". Now I've changed again, I'm signing things "Rodnério". My wife says people will never recognize me because I keep changing my name! But that's my way - if I don't like something any more, I change it. Check this out in MIB #4.

BL: You are classed as an independent comic yet the production and design values of your comic are far better than those of major companies. How did you get all of the contributors, money and drive together to launch Made in Brasil Quadrinhos and keep it going?
RR: Thanks for the compliments, but I think I owe a lot to listening to what real professionals have to say about my magazine, all the dos and don'ts. I'm classified as an independent publisher because I can't afford to pay the people who work for the magazine. I print just a thousand copies, and it's not distributed all over the country. Distributors accept only 10.000 copies or more. Artists who send me their work know me or are my friends' friends.

I also try to select works by both professionals and semi-professionals, to keep a good balance. And we have GRAFAR (a kind of state-run syndicate), which co-ordinates professionals and amateurs who work or intend to work in comics, illustration and cartooning. They are all friends of mine and they help me with MIB every time they can.

And the most amazing thing is that very good artists all over the country are left out of the mainstream because they don't want to draw superheroes or manga – and so they contact me asking if they can send me some short stories! I think God is smiling down at me, sometimes.

The money, as I said, comes totally out of my pocket, except for MIB #4. I don't make a profit, I can't think about that, otherwise I wouldn't publish the magazine. I don't know how long this is going last.

BRITISH EXPLORERS AND POLITICAL EXTREMISTS

ANOTHER of the new breed of independent publishers in Brazil is André Diniz. He told me about his Ninth Art Press, the first new publisher of the new millennium:

I created my own press called Editora Nona Arte (Ninth Art Press) in September 2000, as a way to publish my own comics (I'm 26 years old and live in Rio de Janeiro).
I think you will be interested especially in the first title I've published. Fawcett is the story of Percy Harrison Fawcett, an English colonel who disappeared in the Amazon forest in 1925. He was there to discover the "El Dorado", a legendary city, where all the constructions were believed to be made of gold.
This was a true story, and I created my plot based on all available facts about the colonel. Fawcett has won five awards – 2 for Best Edition, 2 for Best Scenario and one for Best Penciller.
My other title, and possible just as interesting from its curiosity value, is Subversivos. It is the story about the Brazilian dictatorship in the 70s. In 1964, the soldiers deposed the president and begun an authoritarian political system. We're up to #3. This is tough socio-political stuff - stuff like this could not be produced inside Brazil twenty years ago.
All the editions print about 1000 or 2000 copies. It´s important to say that I've never made much money with comics. In Portuguese, we have the expression "ganha-pao", which means "breadwinner", like you do in England, I presume? Well, I call my comics my "breadlosing" job...
You can see some on my site, www.nonaarte.com.br. There, I put some full comics in the PDF format for download, like you have with Borderline. !

Adverts are difficult to get in magazines with so few copies. In that instance God *didn't* smile at me, but what can I do if I have ink in my veins?

BL: What can you tell me about Bodoqe magazine?
RR: Bodoqe is a great political fanzine. People who write for it can't stand Brazil's President's weak political system anymore, and the US is also to blame. They are not communists, they just have a realistic point of view.

Finally, this one because I'm curious - how do you attract restaurants to advertise in your comic???
I don't attract them. All the ads in MIB #3 I published for friends. None of them were paid. Those people helped me in some way when I needed them so I'm just saying thanks, or doing a favour. But in MIB #4 all the ads have been paid for, which allowed me to cover all the printing costs. Unfortunately there was nothing left over for the artists and me!
[Borderline would like to thank Jerri Dias for the Portuguese/ English translation]

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EDIÇÕES TONTO – MINI COMICS WITH A DIFFERENCE

FABIO Zimbres is the publisher behind Edições Tonto – a series of minicomics with some of the top names in Brazilian comics contributing. Zimbres explained to me what Tonto was all about:

Edições Tonto was born when I created, with some friends, the Mini Tonto collection - our version of L'Association's Collection Patte de Mouche. The idea behind it was to give readers a glimpse of what Brazilian alternative cartoonists were doing despite the fact that there were no magazines to publish their work.

This was back in 1997. After the end of the magazines that used to carry Brazilian material - Chiclete com Banana, Mil Perigos, Animal - the 90s offered few opportunities to Brazilian cartoonists, although by now it seems like the market is a little bit healthier, with new readers and publishers being pushed into the market thanks to the manga

craze. Anyway, in 1997 we wanted to show we weren't dead and thought this format was cheap enough for us to do it ourselves, and also less complicated than big anthologies.

So in 1997 we launched the first 7 titles:

1. Mulher Preta Mágica by L F Schiavon.
2. Chumalocatera by Eloar Guazzelli
3. Roma by Eduardo Oliveira
4. Urrú by MZK
5. O Apocalipse segundo Dr. Zeug by Fabio Zimbres
6. As Piadas Vagabundas do Steven by Allan Sieber
7. As Primeiras Tragadas do Dia by Sylvio Ayala

The artists are basically friends of mine and we have been working together since the beginning of the 90s, when I edited Animal and later moved from São Paulo to Porto Alegre. I tried to make it work like some kind of collective but it's hard to get most cartoonists to organize themselves and there's always the money problem - I mean, there's no money! By 1999 I was trying to push it alone and managed, with the help of Lourenço Mutarelli, to publish his Mini Tonto:

8. Requiem by Lourenço Mutarelli

He managed to get the publisher of his regular albums to buy half of his Mini Tonto's print run from me so I could do it.

Last year I started working with a publisher from São Paulo – Opera Graphica – that allows me to print more titles and have them distributed to most cities in Brazil, and still pay less than I would if I did my usual print run. We are printing 1000 now as opposed to the 500 I used to do. And I'm still in charge of the editing and design. Last November we launched the first four issues of our new partnership:

9. Últimas Palavras by Allan Sieber
10. Pinoquio vai à Guerra by Elenio Pico
11. Dimensão Z by Fido Nesti
12. Jaca's Mellitus

Opera Graphica is happy so far with the collection and we should put out some more titles in 2002.

Borderline asked Fabio why he had a publishing house that, when translated, meant "Idiot"?

Well, I have this tendency to write gibberish so it's not a surprise that Alta Vista's Portuguese translator couldn't handle it better! Tonto does mean idiot - and also dizzy - in Portuguese and Spanish. It is a kind of a joke but there are three reasons for choosing this name:

1. I like it. It has this round sound with two Os.
2. There's the Tonto character from the Lone Ranger comics. Since we are from a Third World country I think it's kind of ironic that we use a politically incorrect name for a Native American.
3. The third reason is a joke: it's like saying that you've got to be a bit silly to be involved with this vanishing medium called comics in the third millennium. This is something I really don't believe but anyway... BL

Julio Shimamoto – one of the Brazilian independent comics' most highly respected creators. A man who not only produces some of Brazil's best comics, but actively encourages, helps and even trains young hopefuls. 80% of new Brazilian comics creators site Shima as the biggest single help and influence.

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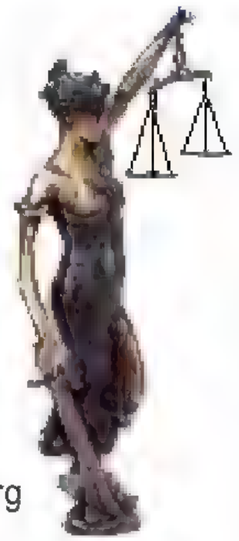
VERDICT COMICS REVIEWS

THIS MONTH'S JURY:

Ade Brown
Andy Cheverton
Mark Clapham
Jennifer Cole
Kelvin Green
Rol Hirst
Mike Kidson
Andrew Lewis
Andrew Luke
Nigel Quinlan
Kevin Schomburg
Andy Winter



Would you like to join our reviews team – The Borderline Psychotics? All you have to do is send a sample of two reviews to Andy Winter: reviews@borderline.mediahall.co.uk and he'll get in touch!

Amazing Spider-Man #37

Marvel Comics
By J. Michael Straczynski and John Romita Jr.

On the surface, this issue contains two parallel tales; one where Peter Parker goes to school to teach and one where Aunt May finds out that Peter is Spider-Man.

Those of us who saw Peter grow up and struggle with the everyday hell of high school will find much to enjoy within this issue that simply isn't on the printed page. It's a clever conceit of the writer that allows the long-time reader to effectively reinterpret the story to their own ends, taking implication and resonance and building on them to add to the obvious work that Peter does as a teacher and making something more. What we are seeing is a lifetime - the boy has grown up and returned to the milieu of his youth to try and make a difference to the lives of those children who are so much like he was at their age. To be a hero without a costume and superpowers, an inspiration and a mentor.

Alongside this are scenes of Aunt May doing little more than sitting on a park bench with a discovered scrap of Spider-Man's costume clutched in her hand. We can see the look on her face, a mixture of the forlorn and betrayed, but what hurts is that we know what is going on beneath the page, in her mind. Years of worrying about Peter and fear of Spider-Man; the times she was in danger because of him and yet saved by him; and, more than anything, the lies and the deceit. Her face asks, "Why?"

I cannot wait for the answer.

The Verdict: With a reverence for the appetites of fans both old and new not seen since Alan Moore's early Swamp Thing, Straczynski and Romita are alive and burning bright on this title. I don't think it's too much to assume that Stan and Steve would be as proud as any fathers to see how this title has grown and matured. (AC)

A Moment of Silence

Marvel Comics
By Various Creators

Away from the politics of war and espionage that inform the current US involvement in Afghanistan, this comic seeks to address the simpler and purer heroism exhibited by the rescue services at Ground Zero in Manhattan.

Bill Jemas' true story tells of a building inspector – the father of a Marvel employee – who, having escaped the Twin Towers, realised the contribution he could make to the rescue efforts and re-entered the burning building, ultimately giving his life for others. It is a plain tale,

diminished not at all by the perennially bland Mark Bagley art, and is powerfully memorable.

Brian Michael Bendis tells another true story of a Cleveland comic shop owner and fire fighter who travelled to the aftermath of September 11 to help in whatever way he could. Bendis and artist Scott Morse make one moment in time stretch almost painfully in their story, with a kick in the tale that is all the more painful for the expertise with which they set it up.

Joe Quesada and Igor Kordey tell the harrowing true story of a father called in to cover for a sick colleague, his subsequent involvement with the F.D.N.Y. at the World Trade Centre, and the tragic effect this has on his family.

In counterpoint to these strips, the tale by Kevin Smith and John Romita Jr. seems lessened by its being presumably fictional. It's a competent story depicting a familiar situation, with a resolution that could go either of two obvious ways, but it seems different to the others; in testament to the shared worldwide reaction to September 11, somehow a true story makes a human connection with the reader in the way a fictional one cannot.

The Verdict: A selection of writers and artists – some good or bad, depending on one's taste - contributing honest, well crafted stories that hit home, and the money is for a good cause, whatever your politics. (AC)

Cerebus #274

Aardvark Vanaheim
By Dave Sim and Gerhard

With each successive issue of Cerebus Dave Sim seem to get crankier, weirder and more filled with, if not hate, then most certainly spleen: towards women, homosexuals, married men and, frankly, the world in general. This seems to correspond with his lead character's slow, comical and bloody journey towards reluctant messiahdom. Feel free to draw whatever conclusion you like from that; I, for one, can't wait to see how it all turns out.

Dave Sim is the artist and writer of Cerebus - well, Gerhard draws the incredible backgrounds and Sim does the layouts and characters. Oh, and actually he didn't write it all either. Some guy called Zivkovic sent Dave a sample of his comic strip way back in 1993, and while Dave thought the art was "amateurish" he nonetheless felt free to lift a chunk of the guy's dialogue to use in this issue (no marks for spotting Zivkovic's bit either, it kinda sticks out.) Now Dave didn't actually get permission to do this. Eight years later, the guy seems to have moved from his old address. Which Dave prints on the inside cover of the current issue, along with a

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promise to send him a cheque for a hundred dollars should he ever get in touch. Dave Sim, champion of creators' rights and self-publishing, used another writer's words without that writer's permission.

Sandwiched between this jaw-dropper and a diatribe about a feminist-homosexualist plot to ensnare all men, or maybe just Dave, in – I swear to God – " an interchangeably-gendered-gay-patterned-lifelong-commitment-with-an interchangably-gendered-partner" which, y'know, you couldn't make up, is an actual issue of Cerebus The Aardvark. It's very funny and, for those of you following the plot, features the aftermath of a massacre of those fat and unattractive proto-feminists, the Cirinists, by a character called, wait for it, Todd "Farlane" McSpahn.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are through the looking glass here. Cerebus is often weird, frequently disturbing, but rarely boring. Read if you dare. Just don't blame me.
The Verdict: The work of a gifted but insane talent. (NQ)

Chiaroscuro #2
Meanwhile Studios
By Troy Little

The good news here is that issue one of this title has been successful enough to keep the series running, and that creator Little has been awarded a Xeric Grant, which should help the title continue even further and, with the resultant publicity, sell more. Which is great news, as Little reckons the complete story to come in around the 30 to 50 issue mark; also, it is truly deserving of success.

The problem with many self-published comics is that, to retain control of their creations, the writers thinks themselves artists, or the artists, writers; rarely are they both to an equal standard, or even a publishable one. Little excels at both, all the more for the fact that his protagonist is flawed and vaguely unlikeable, yet is written with such skill that these traits do not overwhelm his stature as the narrator of the comic.
The Verdict: Solid narration, rich characterisation, believable characters, authentic dialogue, expressive art, smooth storytelling, an eye-catching cover and very few typos. This is so close to a perfect 10. (AC)

The Crusades #11
Vertigo
By Steven Seagle and Kelley Jones

It is a testament to the Vertigo imprint that, once in a while, it still allows a series like this to go its own way, with a slow burn style of storytelling that almost begs readers to diminish in numbers as the story, seemingly imperceptibly, progresses.

What we have in this issue is a minor revelation that we should have seen coming, which manages to pull the unexplained threads of multiple stories together and set the story up for a major climax. Whether that's what the creators (or the publishers) intend remains to be seen.

The puppet master behind the appearance of the Knight may stand revealed, but what ramifications this will have are many and varied, and those readers that have persevered thus far are rewarded with yet more of those subtle twists of narrative that this series - sometimes more so than other, higher profile Vertigo comics - throws into the mix to change the flavouring once again.
The Verdict: Constantly surprising and enjoyable, this stands at the core of the current Vertigo crop as a reminder of what the imprint was once justly famous for. (AC)

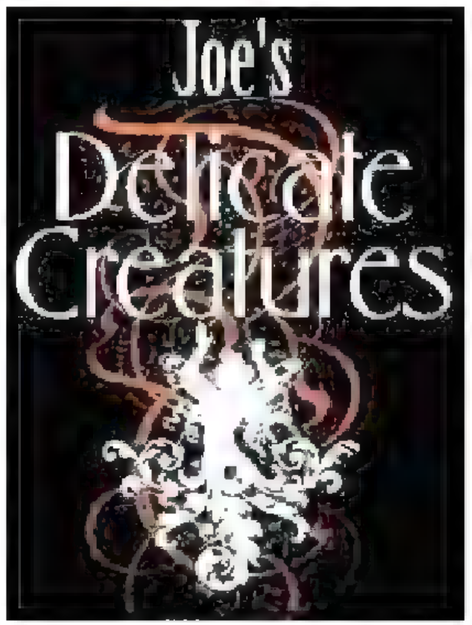
Daredevil: Yellow #6
Marvel Knights
By Jeph Loeb & Tim Sale

And so we reach the end of this series, not - as many had supposed - languishing in the fan-friendly territory of the Year One scenario, but using its reflective environment to ruminate on the entire career of a character, from their earlier origins and mistakes to their modern conclusions and motivations.

In common with many Marvel heroes, Daredevil is propelled by loss; from his father, through Elektra and finally to Karen Page, Matt channels his grief outward, both in the law court and on the street. This isn't a new idea, but never has it been expressed so eloquently as in Loeb's careful and considerate scripting. Coupled with the wonderful art by Tim Sale and Matt Hollingsworth, this has been a wonderful joy to read, and will stand rereading many times, in the tradition of great literature.

While Loeb and Sale can be accused of revisiting the early years of Batman once too often, this new approach to the Year One story – that of the retrospective self-examination by an older version of the central narrator – is interesting, and can be used to reconsider the inner personalities of other characters. One can only hope that the upcoming Spider-Man: Blue will utilise a similar approach.
The Verdict: Beautifully written and illustrated, this is not an action packed adventure story but is more concerned with the character behind the mask. It's a love letter and a eulogy from a hero to his lost loved ones. (AC)

Delicate Creatures
Top Cow
By J. Michael Straczynski and Michael Zulli



This is not, as the cover blurb would have you believe, a graphic novel, but an illustrated short story. It is also not, as originally solicited, $9.95, but $16.95. Those two points should be taken into consideration if you have a particular yen with regard to gaining value for money, especially as the word is that this story will only be available in this hardcover edition.

Also to be taken into account is that there is more to writing than meets the eye. Straczynski is known primarily for his TV and comics work, which require the disciplines of plotting, scripting and dialogue writing. Prose is a whole different can of words. I'm unfamiliar with Straczynski's novels and, given the strength of his work here, disinclined to seek them out.

The story is slight, unsurprisingly given its length, and what subtext it has is at once heavy handed and unfathomable. I've read it twice, all 27 pages of it (oh yes, don't be fooled by the official page count of 56 pages; a lot of that is illustration, some of that artist sketches and an alarming amount dedicated to looking pretty or being blank) and I'm not sure what it's about, either as text or subtext. Doubtless the writer is far cleverer than I, but I was under the impression that the writer was supposed to take the reader along on a journey, not blindfold them, drive them around in circles and leave them at an unfamiliar stop. And if you thought Neil Gaiman wrote in a fey style you're well advised not to bother with this.

Michael Zulli's illustrations are all very fine, drawn in his current loose and sketchy style rather than the exquisitely inked and toned work with which he made his name and which might have fitted the book better. The colouring by Steve Firchow is okay, but looks diminished when compared with the wonderful watercolour work by Zulli on the cover.
The Verdict: Over-packaged and

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over-priced, containing attractive - if not beautiful - artwork and an over-written story with over-blown prose. It's got "over" written all over it. (AC)

Fantastic Stories #1
Amryl Entertainment
By Don Marquez

Initially attracted by what looked very much like an early Frazetta painting on the cover, I soon found that this was another in the constant stream of 50s nostalgia comics that this industry seems never to be rid of. Not that there is anything intrinsically wrong with that; some of such comics - like The Rocketeer - tread their own path and are all the more entertaining for it, and some of the more Frazetta influenced artists - like Bernie Wrightson, Arthur Suydam and Sam Kieth - have moved beyond his inspiration and have produced excellent works in their own right.

Don Marquez, in this comic at least, seems content to produce those simplistic stories with lush artwork with which Frazetta found his fame. One, the original *Grakoom, the Forgotten God!* Is fantastic purely for its lack of believability, rather than its quality, being the sort of pulp nonsense that was fashionable a century ago. The other, an adaptation of Conan Doyle's *The Disintegration Machine*, is interesting only as such.

Marquez does possess a talent with the ink brush, however, producing some quite lovely, delicate feathering and the build up of texture that characterises the work of Frazetta and his imitators. His pencilling, on the other hand, is often weak, with some badly proportioned figures and a blandness to some of his characters that even the quality of the inking cannot hide. The short portfolio of art at the back of the comic shows Marquez at his best, with unforced, lively compositions enhanced by the inking at its strongest.

The Verdict: Very retro storytelling and a lack of pencilling skills greatly enlivened by inking influenced by – and very nearly worthy of – Frazetta himself. (AC)

Felon #2
Image
By Greg Rucka and Matthew Clark

She's fresh out of prison having served her time, and now she's looking for the guys who let her down. She smokes, she robs, she'd not afraid to shoot, and she wants her share of the loot. Sound familiar? If you've read any of Richard Stark's Parker novels, pared down turbo-charged tales of a ruthless, amoral thief, then you'll know exactly the sort of story you're dealing with in Felon. Rucka, a crime novelist himself, knows his way around the genre and seems to be doing a straightforward, distaff riff on Stark's creation.

His anti-heroine (well, villain, really) is efficient, ruthless, capable, extremely attractive and utterly unlikeable. She cuts a brutal swathe through her own gang, using threats, extortion and a shotgun in her quest for her fair share of the take. By the end of the issue, however, she's involved in the set-up of a brand new job.

Rucka succeeds in holding the interest for a tale that's a far cry from original, but which still seems fresh in the comics medium. For a writer, he has a rare and enviable ability to just sit back and let the pictures tell the story. That's Felon's strength: a fast, pacy uncluttered story. It's also its weakness, as artist Matthew Clark doesn't always do the best job of storytelling, and his style is not perhaps best suited to this subject, his characters being just a tad too glamorous for the down-and-dirty setting, while some of his figures are just plain wrong. The colouring is quite good, though, except for the skin tones, which are way too dark.

Rucka's probably canny enough not to go the moral high road on this, so we should be able to look forward to plenty of cool and ruthless take-downs from our professional felon. But he's not likely to go glorifying her either, so we needn't expect an exercise in bad criminal chic.

The Verdict: A longish delay between issues one and two has hurt the flow of this story, but it's definitely worth a look. (NQ)

Four Women #4
Homage
By Sam Kieth

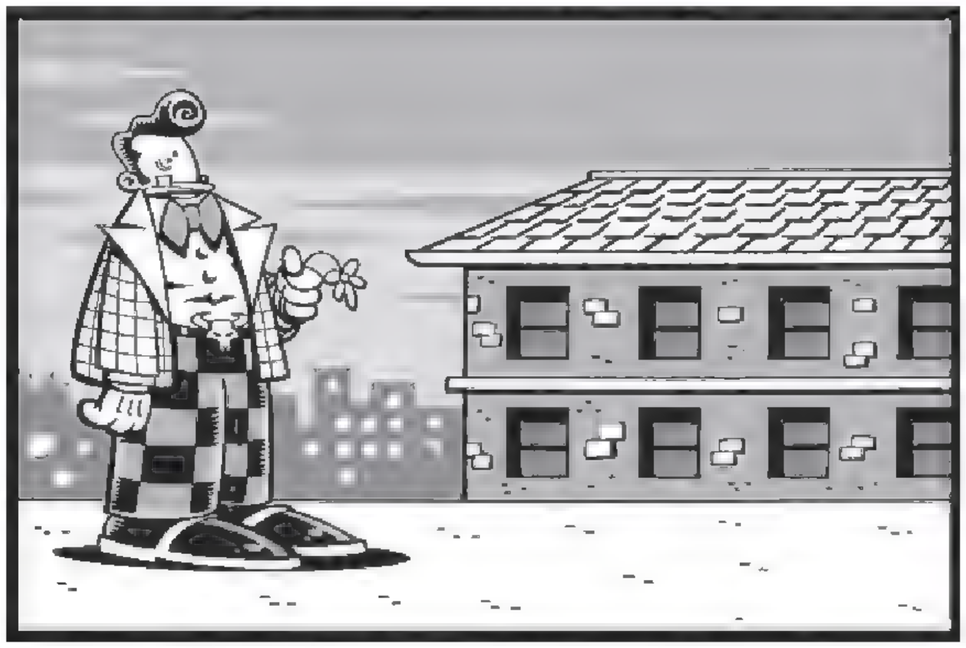
There is a Henry James story called The Turn of the Screw, whose title has entered modern parlance to express that inevitable and unyielding ramping of tension that we often feel. It would describe, with absolute and chilling precision, the experience of reading this series.

This issue, like those before it, relates the tale - told in flashback by a more and more unreliable narrator - of four women besieged in their car by two male strangers on a deserted back road. That's all it is. That and the unending, grinding turn of the screw.

There isn't a better comic than this at the moment. Not even close. I wish there was something even remotely near the quality of this with which to make a comparison, but there isn't.

The Verdict: Each issue has been the best comic of its month, and the finished series will be the best of the year, of that I have no doubt. (AC)

Fred the Clown #2
Hotel Fred Press
By Roger Langridge



I read this one to the strains of Orquestra Was's acid jazz covers of Hank Williams numbers – lazy, toe-tapping grooves underpinning bleak, despairing lyrics. It fit perfectly, an exercise in contrasts to match the uproarious laughter provoked by the utter failure that is Fred's life.

But there's more to this comic than just humorous contrast. Langridge also evokes resonances from the first half of the 20th century. Both Fred himself and the mute visual language of the comic echo the tropes and metres of classic silent film comedy, Buster Keaton crossed with Charlie Chaplin with occasional interruptions from the Keystone Cops. Fred's futile attempts to find love tend to be responded to with a brick bounced off his bonce, Ignatz Mouse's treatment of the ever hopeful Krazy Kat. Whether these are deliberate I have no idea - but they are present, and they add historical depth to what might otherwise be a poignant experience.

But perhaps it wouldn't. When all is said and done Langridge's solid, weighty artwork is incredibly amusing in its own right, and his obvious love for puns and wordplay infects the funny bone constantly. Yet, behind the laughter it's hard not to feel for Fred – like Pagliacci he must laugh, and make us laugh, when really there is nothing at all to laugh about.

The Verdict: Brilliant existential slapstick, as bitter as it is sweet. (MK)

Green Arrow #11
DC
By Kevin Smith and Phil Hester

Oliver Queen's new "ward" Mia aspires to be the next Speedy, while also showing signs of a developing attraction to her benefactor; cue discussion between Queen and son Connor Hawke about the twin dangers of the kid sidekick and the teenage crush.

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There's enough story here to grab the attention, and Hester's art remains stylised and coherent; but there's nothing to really *hold* the attention, which is what is needed. Smith's previous storyline was overlong and somewhat plodding, but it left the reader wanting to move on to the next issue. This doesn't. It's inconsequential, particularly in comparison with other similar comics, and that comparison is invited by titling this issue *Ultimate Speedy*, something a sensible writer (or editor) should have avoided. It beggars belief that DC could assemble such a team as they do here to so little effect.
The Verdict: Modern day creators and up to date production turn out a comic that differs little from any other DC superhero comic of the last two decades. If this is the closest DC can manage to a Top Ten-selling monthly, then they may as well pack up now. (AC)

Hammer of the Gods Color Saga
Insight Studios
By Michael Avon Oeming and Mark Obie Wheatley

Oeming (Powers, Footsoldiers) and Wheatley (Breathtaker, Radical Dreamer) have updated the heroic sagas of Norse mythology for the Hammer of the Gods series, and here they have woven into the story a reason for colour to be added. Let's just say that the reason arises from the source of colour in the Norse gods' world. Oeming is the main mover behind the series, but Wheatley helps with scripts, and for part of the book he draws too.

As a child, our hero, Modi, was cursed by a witch, and has powers to slay the gods, dragons, giants and witches that beset humankind with problems as long as he does not take up a weapon himself. In this tale, Modi demonstrates what he does best - slays giants and witches. The action is direct and clear, similar to the DC animated series and, of course, Oeming's work on Powers. The language has just enough arcane grammar as is necessary to set the scene. Neither of these factors gets in the way of the excellent story.

Perhaps, like the mythological metaphors that inspired it, the Color Saga can be seen as inspirational.

In the case of the Norse Myths, we were told of epic battles and journeys in a lyrical fashion. As the Rainbow Bridge is melted by a disgruntled dragon, the world loses its colour, becoming a dull and dreary monochrome place. Just to make things worse, Loki inadvertently transforms the drunken gods into their animal counterparts. This means he has to enlist the help of Modi to call on his Valkyrie friend Skõgul, but not before the bitter Modi has also been transformed into a duck!

This reader also saw a spurious colour versus black and white analogy, but perhaps I'm looking too hard?

When things become black and white, all the characters assume a dull, listless life - of course, that's not how black and white comics actually are, but there are some folks who see them that way. And I cannot help but think that the story's final words are aimed at that attitude. Modi says "What are you complaining about, it's in colour isn't it?"
The Verdict: It's a fun action adventure with comics treated as the contemporary versions of the Norse Sagas - exaggerated, heroic exploits. (AB)

Herobear and the Kid #4
Astonish Comics
By Mike Kunkel

This is a comic garnering much attention by word of mouth – more often than not a sign of quality. My kid read the first issue after me and has read all issues since; otherwise I personally would not have bought them.

The long and the short of it is, this is a comic book for children. There is no level at which an adult could - or should - enjoy this, because it's written in the condescending tone of a patronising adult telling kids that the world is a fine and dandy place where nothing really bad ever happens. The depiction of death and loss is facile, and the concept of danger is mitigated with that of childish excitement. If you're a kid, all well and good and I hope you progress to something a little more realistically balanced in due course. If you're an adult reading and seriously enjoying this, then there's something skew-whiff in Denmark.

The pencilled art is wonderfully delicate and expressive, but made amateur by Kunkel's insistence on leaving his loose pencil construction lines everywhere. It's not cute or idiosyncratic; it's sloppy.
The Verdict: Written with a sugary tweeness that makes Walt Disney look positively hypoglycaemic, so relentlessly nostalgic as to be dangerous and littered with appallingly obvious grammatical errors, I'm not even so sure this should be given to young children. (AC)

Hunter: The Age of Magic #7
DC
By Dylan Horrocks and Chris McLoughlin

What? What?! This issue left me in total bafflement. I spend the last four weeks pondering over the few possibilities still left open to me to express my dissatisfaction about the newest incarnation of a comic book featuring Timothy Hunter – without boring you, the readers. And without repeating myself. And now – what?!?

This can't possibly be the same series I've been reading for the last six months. The lack of coherent dialogue, badly paced pages and uninspired artwork, a story which left me wondering where Dylan Horrocks was heading with the character – are they all a thing of the past? This would have been an excellent first issue reintroduction of Tim. Horrocks has written by far the most concise script the series has seen yet, artist Chris McLoughlin delivers pencils which in their detailed beauty and fine inking are reminiscent of early Vertigo days, the page layout is a beauty to behold, and, best of all, Tim's diary is back! He takes notes in abundance while saying his good-byes to the White School and his love interest of the recent storyline, and returning to where he belongs, England.

There Tim has to magically break a path through a pattern of intricate traps other mages have laid out for him in anticipation of his arrival. Meanwhile, not far from the White School's incarnation on our dimensional plane in Cornwall, England, Mr. Lily, the scary antagonist leader from the The Names of Magic miniseries, returns...

The amusing use of magic, the insight into the protagonist, the dialogue with Yoyo, Tim's return to London, the unexpected cliffhanger, and the really pretty art and colouring make this issue of Hunter: The Age of Magic a true joy to read. However, from recent solicitations it appears that Chris McLoughlin is a guest artist only; so now we wait and see if regular penciler Richard Case can hold up the high quality introduced by his fill-in next month.

Did I mention that Tim has lost his goatee?
The Verdict: Everything is good in this issue! (KS)

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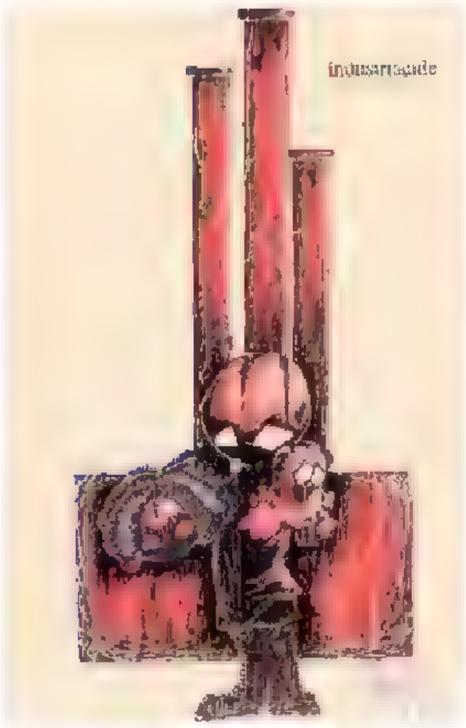
Industriacide #1
Broken Tree Publications
By Sean Dietrich



Good grief, surely there's a law to prevent the dispossessed and nihilistic teenager from writing anything beyond that which the school system requires? Well, there bloody well should be.

First things first – Dietrich can draw, and can compose a passable comic narrative with his art, and ink it quite intricately. From the evidence of the cover, he can attract the attention of the casual browser with strong design and subtle use of paint.

He can't, however, write for toffee. Oh, he can *write* sure enough; pages and pages of interminable self-loathing and graphic psychological examination. And adjectives - my god, all the adjectives - are there any left for the rest of us? And the casual swearing that can't help but be so obvious in its casualness; the violence without meaning; the characters without...well...character, I suppose.

I could tell you all the plot of this nonsense; I know what it is because I looked it up in the *Previews* solicitation. But then you might get interested and buy this crap and realise that there isn't any story here at all, just wallowing in self-pity of the worst kind, unleavened by any wit or insight that might elevate it to any level of artistic statement at all.

Good grief, there should be a law. The Verdict: It looks fine, like all those Gothic sorts of comics look these days. But you don't want to read this, not if you're over the age of 20 or have any sort of tether to the real world. You have to feel sorry for the poor bastard, don't you? (AC)

Jack Staff #7
Dancing Elephant Press
By Paul Grist

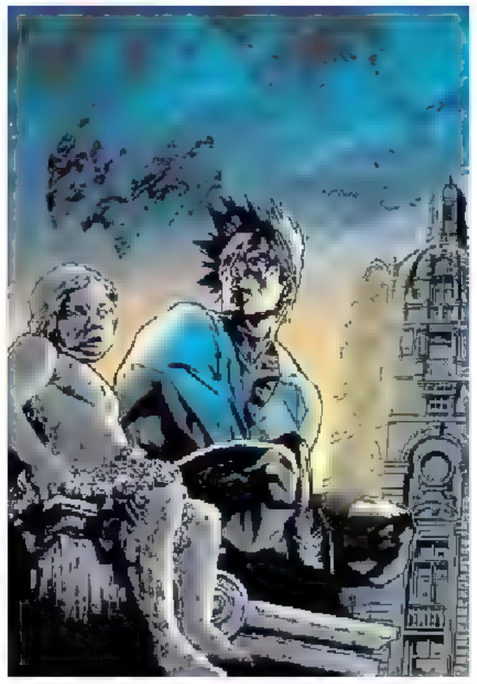
It's hard to describe Jack Staff to someone who's never read it. It's kind of like putting Captain America, *Dad's Army* and Valiant in a blender and making a Rorschach's blot out of the result. Paul Grist's patriotic superhero is gentle, fun and kind of warm in the way we'd all like to think Britain was between the wars but know wasn't. This issue, our eponymous hero gets a final run out with his old mucker the Spider. Tea, Rich Tea and *Steptoe And Son* references are just so nice and cosy in an American format superhero comic that it's impossible to resist Jack Staff's charms. I thought by now the novelty value might have worn off - but it's going to take a while yet.
The Verdict: Methadone for British Captain Americaphiles. (JC)

The Kindred II #1
Wildstorm
By Brett Booth and Sal Regla

In the downtime between one volume of WildCATs and the next, this Grifter junkie needed her fix and, well, the first Kindred mini-series wasn't so bad. Unfortunately, that had the novelty value of throwing you a few more morsels of the retro-continuity the WildStorm universe hinted at but hadn't yet, then, delivered. This time round, there's little more than a run-of-the-mill government conspiracy, investigated by the love-hate partnership of Backlash and Grifter, to entertain us. Booth has some good stories in him, but his clumsy dialogue and sometimes awkward plot turns never quite let us forget that he's one of the few Image artists who never accepted that his writing skills weren't quite up to scratch. This would be so much better with the addition of a more accomplished script assist from Jeph Loeb or the like. Even the flashback to the 1968 sequence seems little more than an excuse to ram home to the reader that Grifter and Backlash really, really, really don't like each other – just in case you missed the several pages of them trading insults or the string of supporting characters who've been spelling it out for you all issue. Yeah, it's trashy Image heroes, but you know I like this stuff. Give me a break.
The Verdict: An average but entertaining diversion to keep WildStorm junkies happy until the new WildCATs series arrives. (JC)

Nightwing #65
DC
By Chuck Dixon and Trevor McCarthy

Not another bloody *Batman Universe* crossover, but never mind. After all, the big B himself isn't actually in this issue for more than a couple of panels, leaving plenty of room for character interaction and development instead.



Bruce Wayne has been accused of murdering radio celeb Vesper Fairchild. Did he do it? I guess we all know which side to place our bets on, but there's still room for a good story in here and some touching dialogue. "You know Bruce Wayne?" a colleague of Dick Grayson's remarks, soliciting the beautiful reply "I like to think I do." Later, it's genuinely shocking to see Dick, with the memory of losing it against the Joker a couple of crossovers back still fresh in his mind, allowing himself to briefly admit that he doesn't think such an act is beyond Bruce. Nonetheless, he and Babs are more than ready to commit themselves to uncovering the truth, however long that may take and regardless of whether Bruce is prepared to help or thank them for it afterwards.
The Verdict: I'm going to miss Chuck Dixon when he's gone - no doubt about it. (JC)

Noble Causes #1
Image
Jay Faerber, Patrick Gleason and Amanda Conner

Not, strictly speaking, the first issue of this title, as an introductory one-shot came out a couple of months back, but that's not to stop you picking this up and reading on from here. Chances are, you'll be heading back to the comic shop for that one-shot later.

This is a self-avowed attempt by writer Faerber to do superhero comics as soap opera, not in the sense that many contemporary comics do so, but by bringing the soap opera aspect to the fore, rather than simmering in the background as a cohesive hook between issues. This works rather brilliantly, admittedly by piling on the allegiances, secret affairs and shock revelations thick and fast, but the effect that it has is that the reader barely has pause to consider the silliness of it before the next ridiculous – yet audience pleasing – twist occurs.

Another neat concept is that of two stories per issue, one set in the current continuity and the other (an 8 page backup featuring guest artists) telling a tale set in the past. Already, two issues in, the cumulative effect is obvious - the reader feels as if they've been reading this for years. The eight pages manage a story longer and more detailed than a simple flashback, filling in information without interrupting the flow of the main story, and the chronological distance between the two stories adds the dimension of time to enrich the scope of the comic.
The Verdict: I don't like generic superhero comics and I don't watch any soap opera at all. Why this appeals so highly to me is God's own mystery; maybe it's that elusive element called quality. (AC)

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Origin #4
Marvel
By Paul Jenkins and Andy Kubert

Sometimes, as George Lucas discovered to his cost, doing a prequel to existing, well-received work can backfire quite horribly. There is a juggling act required between adhering to the spirit and intention of the original whilst adding to it without somehow diminishing it. And here, given the obvious lack of Wolverine or any other superheroes, Marvel is relying on the abilities of its creators to tell an interesting story of a superhero origin shorn of all attendant fireworks.

Origin is a one-sided love story, a tale about loss and grief and guilt and the building of the psychology that would result in the creation of the mutant Wolverine; he is savage, yet tender; vengeful, yet noble; powered by his past, yet able to recall little of it. All of these traits - the complimentary and the contradictory - are given their genesis here, in a story that does what few have ever done before; it gives not only a valid physical origin to a hero, but an in-depth mental one as well. This isn't about how Logan gained the powers that transformed him into Wolverine, but about what happened to a young man that led to him becoming Logan in the first place; the origin not of the physical superhero, but of the mind behind the mask that guides the hero.
The Verdict: In terms of concept and execution, this is unique in the current marketplace. Marvel's "greatest story never told" may well prove to be the greatest story they've ever told. (AC)

Slow News Day #4
Slave Labour Graphics
By Andi Watson

A unique title, this, being a gentle, down to earth kitchen sink drama of sorts about an American journalist who goes to work as an intern for a tiny British newspaper, the Wheatstone Mercury. More interested in advertising revenue and publishing stories about ant colonies in the motors of car park barriers delaying the local mayor's car than in high-level political scandals or international wars, the paper's something of a culture shock for our laptop-wielding heroine, Katharine Washington. She's busy writing a script for a sit-com set in a small town British newspaper, something that doesn't go down at all well with her British reporter colleague, Owen. Despite themselves, they come to like each other and enjoy their work, leading to tensions with their respective boyfriend and girlfriend. (He's wheeling and dealing in LA, she's in charge of advertising at the Mercury.)

With clear, well-defined and downright adorable art and some sharp back and forth between Katharine and Owen, this rather hum-drum, sub–*Four Weddings* material comes to life on the page, making it a pure pleasure to read. It's extremely funny in places, and there are some well-played moments of drama and mild conflict.

As characters, Owen and Katharine are well-developed, a study in contrasts but fundamentally nice people. Watson builds his story slowly around them and the result is immensely enjoyable. It's a fun, charming comic set in an ordinary, everyday world, entirely free of melodrama and violence, and there are precious few comics like it out there.
The Verdict: A lovely, funny, charming comic that's certain to bring a smile to your face. (NQ)

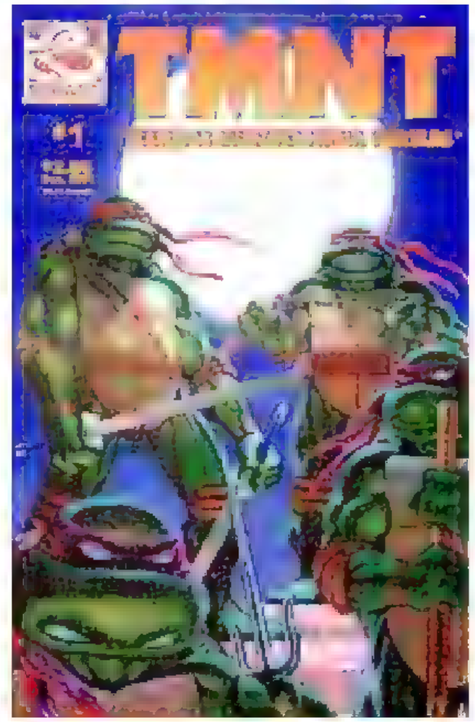
The Spectre #13
DC
By J.M. DeMatteis and Ryan Sook

Can a great artist save a bad comic? Obviously not – Ryan Sook is one of the most interesting talents to emerge in the last few years, his work a joy to behold. But even he can't stop The Spectre from being a really bad comic.

This, Sook's final issue, is an even more ponderous excursion into pseudo-spiritual gibberish than usual, told as an illustrated short story rather than in panels and speech balloons. It's a tale of love unbound by time, which is ironic as readers with long memories will have read this all before - it's a reincarnation of one of the key plot threads of DeMatteis' run on Dr Fate. In fact, there's a lot of Fate retold in The Spectre, both series having a loved-up 60s vision of God at their core. However, Dr Fate used to have jokes and action too, and this title has precious little of either.

There's some satisfaction to be gathered from this comic, though, in spite of the dreadful script. Sook presents us with a series of beautifully composed, beguiling images. What a shame the pretty pictures serve such an abysmal bit of storytelling. One can only hope Ryan Sook resurfaces soon, with a better vehicle for his talents. In the meantime, readers joining Hal Jordan on the road to redemption will no doubt continue to find it a tiresome and painful journey.
The Verdict: This is a dire comic about reincarnation - I must have done something truly terrible in a previous life to end up reading it. (MC)

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles # 1
Mirage Publishing
By Peter Laird and Jim Lawson



There's something of an anachronistic feeling about buying a new Turtles comic. Many years after starting the black-and-white boom that made, and almost broke, the independent comic market - and some years after the unsuccessful attempts at a full colour comic and an Image interpretation - the Turtles are back again, this time in the hands of co-creator (and now sole owner) of the property, Peter Laird.

And it's like they were never away. Starting with a back to basics approach, Laird is in control of the whole thing, writing, lettering, inking and toning while Mirage mainstay Lawson does the pencilling, making the whole comic look exactly as it used to, and unlike anything else on the shelves, both then and now. Everything from the wonky anatomy and exuberant dialogue to the lush toning brings back a host of memories of Turtles comics of the past, which is just as well as this issue drops you in the deep end from the outset.

In fact, the main impediment to the success of this comic (other than a prejudice against the 80s connotations that the Turtles engender) is that it simply picks up the story as it stood years ago. Little attempt is made to ease the prospective new reader into the characters and situations. Instead the Turtles, Casey and April (now married), the child Shadow (now a teenager) and old villains come together in a story that, while wholly enjoyable, may leave those unfamiliar with the scenario more than a little lost.
The Verdict: Maybe too confident of its own success, this comic seems to assume that those thousands of fans that made this so successful in the past are still around today. They're not. I am the last of that once proud breed and I can only afford to buy one of each issue. (AC)

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Truth Serum #1
Slave Labor Graphics
By Jonathan Adams

Lester is a short, trouserless monkey-boy living in a town full of superheroes and villains. Captain Force uses his X-ray vision to peek beneath the blouses of bank tellers and complete strangers are attacked by Eagle Man under the mistaken impression that they are his arch-enemy, The Radiator. All of this plus romance, blackmail and grilled cheese sandwiches.

There's often a dodgy middle ground to be found when the independent comic publishers attempt to horn in on the superhero genre. Sometimes (like in Generic Comic Book) you find a gentle and affectionate parody of the genre; more often, you'll get something that is either a high-handed slur or a watered down attempt to replicate the success of the Big Two US publishers.

Truth Serum is a little different, and something quite new. Its approach seems to be relentlessly independent, fusing the concept of Astro City with the storytelling of Acme Novelty Library and the characterisation of Optic Nerve. And, as strange as it may sound, this comic may well appeal to anyone who reads those comics, because Adams doesn't pitch his tent in any camp so much as erect a huge Big Top over them all.
The Verdict: An independent superhero comic that takes all the tropes of both styles and mixes them equally and respectfully into a satisfying blend of the two. (AC)

War Story: Nightingale
Vertigo
By Garth Ennis and David Lloyd

There is a common thread running through each of the four self-contained comics that have made up Garth Ennis's War Story series. From the sadistic Fepo of Johann's Tiger to General Bledding in Screaming Eagles, the stories' protagonists have been as at odds with those on their own side as with their official enemies.

In Nightingale, Ennis's collaboration with the impeccable David Lloyd, we witness what really destroys the crew of the proud battleship - not enemy guns and torpedoes, but poor decision making by their superiors. Ordered to hunt German battleship the Tirpitz, the Nightingale has to relinquish its protective role over a fleet of merchant vessels then listen as report after report is radioed in of those ships' destruction. And all the while the Tirpitz is docked safely in harbour, admiralty intelligence being exposed as a deadly combination of guesswork and panic.

After which the crew never recover - there are fatal accidents and a suicide and one last mission which takes the crew and vessel into the fiery depths of hell itself.

There's a lot of anger here, as indeed there is in each of the three preceding titles - this is another of Ennis's hymns to the common man caught up in the absurd machinations of the great and the good, as different from the writer's bollock-hunting Rifle Brigade loons as it is from the spandex-clad pantomime that fills so many comic-shop shelves. The whole thing has been meticulously researched, being as reminiscent in its knowledge of the horrors of early 20th Century warfare as Pat Mills' *Charley's War*, rather than being another re-hash of Saturday afternoon stiff upper lip movies.

Lloyd's artwork creates appropriate mood throughout, something to be expected from the co-creator of V For Vendetta. Whether it's the freezing, sunless Arctic or the infernal conclusion, the artist's bold strokes and gouged out shadow-work allow you to *feel* as well as see the men's ordeals. And from celebratory below-decks scenes to the fighting itself there is an energy, a movement and emotional intensity other more showy artists frequently fail to capture.
The Verdict: Vertigo are to be applauded for commissioning a series which doesn't sit comfortably alongside a superfluity of airy-fairy Sandman retreads and it is to be hoped that Ennis, too, is encouraged to devote more time in the future to projects with the integrity and compassion of War Story. (AL)

Marvel Mangaverse: New Dawn #1
Marvel; By Ben Dunn

FIRST impressions count, and upon finally reading the first issue of Marvel's *Mangaverse* event, this reviewer gets the impression that what may have started out as a gimmick, and was seen by many as just that, is actually something very good indeed. Which is lucky for Marvel.

There is not a hint here of the cynical money-grabbing or creative desperation usually associated with fifth-week events and miniseries. Unexpectedly, perhaps, Marvel has actually taken the manga concept and done something both worthwhile and entertaining with it. Gone are the huge spreads and two-panel-a-page layouts that are seen so often in mainstream US manga, as in Image's output, for instance. Japanese manga clocks in at upwards of 300 pages per book so such a sparse layout is acceptable, but in a 22-page, $2.95 comic such a practice is inexcusable. So it is even more pleasing to see that Marvel, in its first major attempt at an original manga title, has succeeded, at least in the looks department, where Image and others have failed. Ben Dunn's art is absolutely gorgeous to look at, and is not cramped or hindered by being presented through pages packed to the edges with panels. Given that this $3.50 comic runs to 40 pages, this is truly value for money.

The art is simple yet effective, with none of the sometimes unnecessary image processing which occasionally mars such titles as Warlands; Guru eFX provide wonderful colouring. Dunn has superb storytelling skills, and a suitably kinetic style. Moreover, he has no qualms about letting his visual imagination go a little wild, and proves he can draw anything from underwater scenes to outer space action.

On the writing front, Dunn is less effective, but only marginally so. He sets up the "same, but different" setting very well, although there are the occasional clunky moments where characters come over all Claremontian and begin spouting huge gobs of exposition at the reader. However, in order to set up the situation and move on to the excellent action scenes, it is something of a necessary evil. The same perhaps applies to the characters themselves, who, with some notable exceptions (the alcohol-obsessed Nick Fury is a delight, as is the sassy but deadly Tigra), are left somewhat without depth. In terms of crafting the setting itself, Dunn has outdone himself. In blending the classic Marvel Universe with the genre traditions of manga, an alternate Marvel Universe has been produced which is in many ways more interesting than the *Ultimate Marvel* setting. The ideas here range from the obvious but inspired (the giant Iron Man mecha) to the truly bizarre but somehow fitting (the recasting of the Hulk as a Godzilla-style city destroying behemoth). The readers are left with a setting that is reassuringly familiar, whether they approach from the manga direction or the Marvel Universe direction, but which contains enough key differences to keep the reader's interest. On these grounds alone, this comic is a huge success.

It is heartening to see Marvel experimenting and producing good results. At the moment of writing, this *Mangaverse* event is scheduled to be only a miniseries, but there is already, with the first issue, a great deal of potential for continuation of the setting, even if it is only through the occasional graphic novel.
The Verdict: A successful experiment, and a superb creative effort. Great stuff. (KG)

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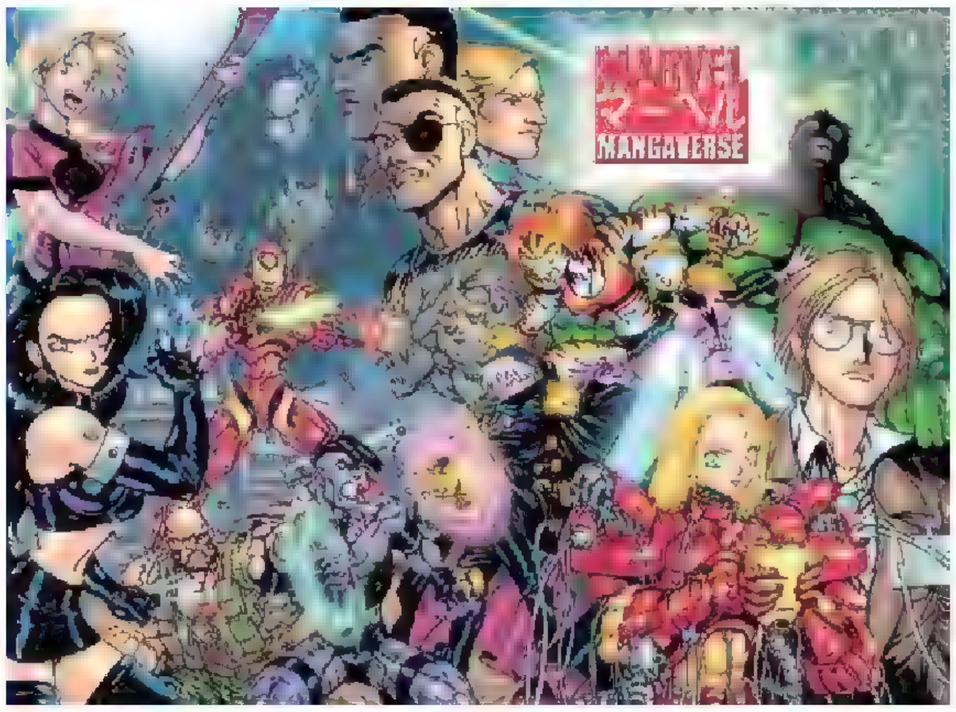
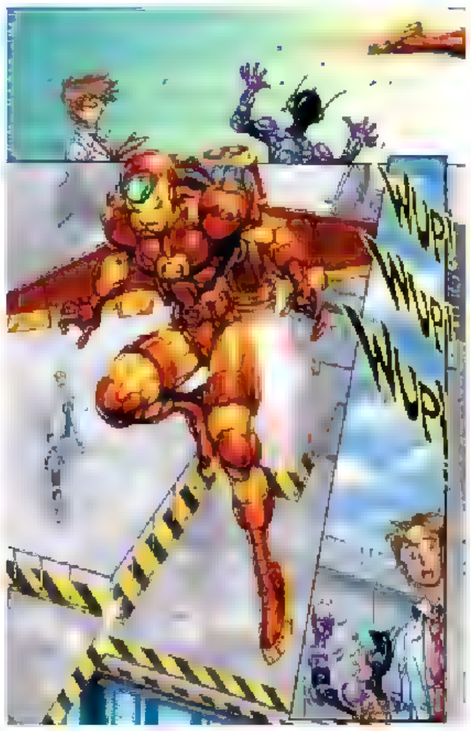
MARVEL MANGAVERSE

Avengers Assemble! #1
By Studio Udon
Fantastic Four #1
By Adam Warren, Keron Grant and Rob Stull
Ghost Riders #1
By Chuck Austen
The Punisher #1
By Peter David and Lea Hernandez
Spider-Man #1
By Kaare Andrews
X-Men #1
By C.B. Cebulski, Jeff Matsuda, A.J. Jothikumar and Andy Owens
(All Marvel Mangaverse)

AFTER the stupendous first issue, Marvel presents us with a mixed bag indeed as the manga story continues. Each comic is set in parallel and focuses on a part of the reinterpreted Marvel Universe, as the Hulk continues the destructive rampage which began in New Dawn.

Avengers Assemble! has the closest plot connection to the main storyline, as the Earth's Mightiest Heroes attempt to solve the problem of the Hulk. It is also the worst of the *Mangaverse* titles so far. Either the writer completely misunderstands the manga concept, or this is an ill-advised attempt to address other aspects of Japanese pop culture. What we have here is the Avengers





recast as the Power Rangers in a highly camp adventure that is completely at odds with the tone of the rest of the Mangaverse series. The art is the sole saving grace of this otherwise very bad comic.

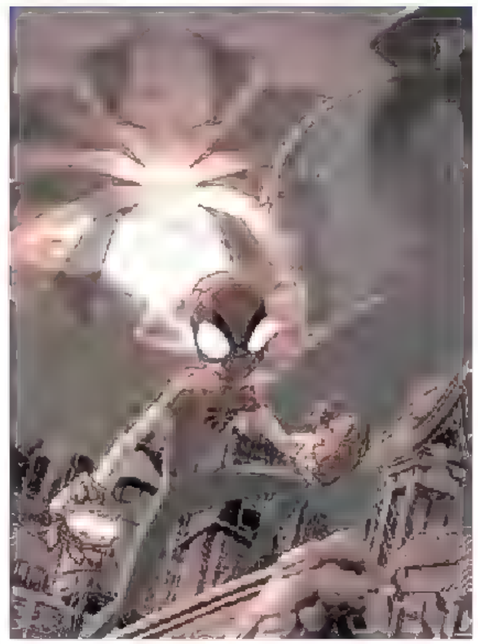
Fantastic Four picks up the pace with some superb moody art by Keron Grant and a truly inspired reinvention of the classic team. Adam Warren writes them very well, and they are given a surprising amount of depth, considering this is just a single issue. The portrayal of Reed Richards is particularly interesting, as is the twist created in the traditional caregiver personality of the Invisible Woman. A superb comic, although it has no ties at all to the main plot. It is also a great shame that there is no revised Doctor Doom here.

Chuck Austen's Ghost Riders should be an utter failure, but its tale of Hellstorm and Ghost Rider defending New York from Satana is redeemed from Avengers Assemble! levels of ineptitude solely by Austen's writing, which is very funny indeed. Nonetheless, the art is mostly terrible, being a nasty mix of computer generated backgrounds and traditionally drawn characters. A Brian Michael Bendis-style use of repeated panels backfires for Austen and just looks lazy. It's a mystery how this fits in, though, since it doesn't look like manga, nor does it read like manga. Still, it is funny.

The Punisher wins the prize for strangest reinterpretation, as Frank Castle is ditched in favour of a school headmistress who dons black and white samurai garb to become the scourge of the underworld. It's well written by Peter David, although it seems a little rushed, and this Punisher seems to have no motivation. Lea Hernandez's art is a little out of place, but is attractive and the costume redesign is superb (spot the traditional skull logo!). Like Ghost Riders, it doesn't really fit the Mangaverse concept; but it is a great deal better than Austen's effort.

Spider-Man is, along with Fantastic Four, the most successful of these Mangaverse titles outside of the main plot. The traditional story is reinvented in a martial arts/ ninja setting with great success, although there is a definite Star Wars influence observable. The art is absolutely beautiful and the writing is strong, although Spider-Man's all-important guilt complex seems to have less emphasis here than in the main Marvel Universe. However, writer/ artist Kaare Andrews does provide a classic Spidey dilemma towards the end. The connection to the main "rampaging Hulk" plot is very cleverly done. Brilliant.

X-Men ends on an ambiguous note, as if the story exceeded its page length or to leave Marvel room to continue this part of the Mangaverse. Unfortunately, the comic's decidedly average quality means that Fantastic Four or Spider-Man would be much better choices for a continuing series. The plot is fairly weak, being a simple "character gets kidnapped and the X-Men get her back" set-up. More careful editing would have helped, as there are a number of plot holes, and one of the revamped characters goes unnamed for the entire comic. Since these are reinventions, and may be quite different from the originals,



giving names to all of them might be a good idea! That said, the reinvented characters are quite well done, with the new Wolverine/ Cyclops relationship being particularly interesting. Jeff Matsuda and A.J. Jothikumar provide art which, while very cartoony, is quite attractive, and tells the meagre story well.

The Verdict: None of these are essential to the main *Mangaverse* plot, but Fantastic Four and Spider-Man are essential purchases, even for those not following the manga-inspired event. (KG)

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ZINESEEN

Gr'nn #12
(Available for Euros 3 from Gr'nn, Helperbrink 15, 9722 EE Groningen, The Netherlands)

Five years after it first emerged from the thriving Groningen small press scene, Gr'nn is looking very healthy indeed. It retains its original, unassuming A5 format and deliberately punkish, DIY editorial style, but the photocopier has given way to the printer and the range of styles it presents, from Jan-Willem de Vries's moody line and wash work to Marcel Ruitjers' solid black phantasmagoric visions, from psychedelic outpourings to clear, humorous line work, is deeply satisfying. Most of the contents are themed around the anniversary, with the number 5 being used as a springboard for the majority of the short stories herein; obviously it'll help a lot if you can read Dutch, but even if you can't there's so much style, so much choice on offer here that I'd recommend anyone to take a look at it.
The Verdict: A small press mainstay which always offers big possibilities. (MK)

Heironymous Bush #1-2
(Available for $1 (or £1 using International Reply Coupons) each from James Turek, 1105 Glenwood Avenue #2, Atlanta GA 30316)
The President of the United States doesn't just launch foreign strikes and carry a gun, you know. Oh no, he also spends a certain amount of his time doing hallucinogens and meeting with mythological creatures. It's just a typical day out for Heironymous Bush, whether it be hanging with his frat brothers or his equally dysfunctional political cohorts, searching for the Loch Ness monster or talking with his father, Zeus. Oh yeah! Cartoonist James Turek is having a lot of irreverent fun here, casting these lunatic scenarios: a minimal, child-like approach is just what is called for in these absurd tours of the landscapes of America and... somewhere else altogether.
The Verdict: This is just stupid and very recommended. (AL)

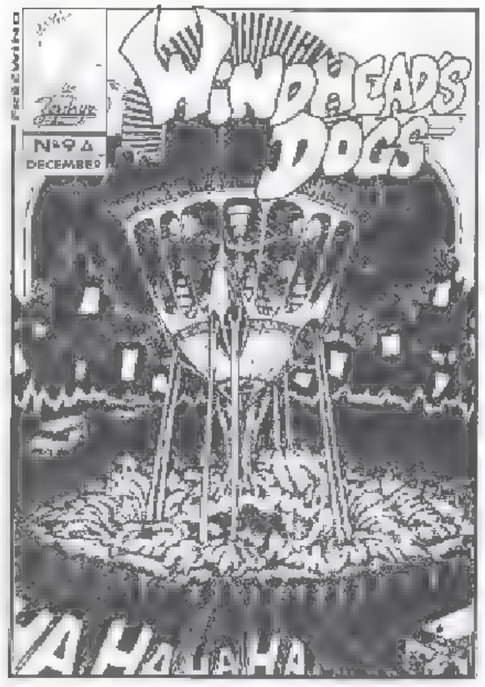
Sinmakers #1
(70p for 20 A5 pages from www.smallzone.co.uk)
It's difficult to decide precisely which scene in Sinmakers has the most potential to offend. The first six pages alone contain a graphic rape, cunnilingus, a shape-changing dick, a ménage a trois, child abuse, a "golden shower" and enough violence to keep Garth Ennis fans in hog heaven for weeks. And then, of course, there's the appearance of a seven-foot phallus at the story's, erm, climax.
Gratuitous, chaotic, unpleasant and at times downright ridiculous, Sinmakers nevertheless contains a raw, spiky energy and extraordinary pitch-black humour that makes it worth a look. Its defiantly lo-fi production values, bad lettering and scratchy art are also a pleasing reminder of a recent past when small press titles didn't have to be full colour glossy pamphlets or perfect bound books to get themselves noticed.
Plot-wise it's all over the place (something to do with super telepaths returning to an orphanage to confront an old friend/foe, I think) but again there are enough interesting ideas and insane plot twists to retain the attention even when you haven't a clue which character is which or quite what the hell is going on.
The Verdict: Writer/artist Shane Rivetts has the potential to become an important new voice on the UK's small press scene - he's unlikely to get many calls from Paul Levitz or Bill Jemas, though. (AW)

Topaz #19-20
(Available for £2 from Jason Lyne (Aladdin), 15 Brazwick Avenue, North Bersted, Bognor Regis, West Sussex, PO21 5DZ)
Jason Lynne has sent me copies of the last two issues of Topaz, a compendium of tricks and whizzes which features works by, amongst others, Italian Claudio Parenteles, who regularly produces a lovely slim-line which circles and turns too, like graffiti with purpose: the page contains it with honesty. It's a lot of fun to look at. Mal Earl, Craig, Andy Brown and editor Jason Lyne are amongst the varied contributors.

Like Sunburn or Stripburger, Topaz is host to a good range of artists, a very good range of artists, stylistically and geographically. This is a thoroughly recommendable, quality dependable comic, each issue with a theme, which *does* work and *does* provide a common bond. Issue 19 is sub-titled "Cults", and in issue 20 the link for strips is "Underground".
The Verdict: An accessible and approachable international collection, as likely as you're gonna get. (AL)

Windhead's Dogs #8
(Issues #1-9 are free with SAE per issue from PO Box 6, Liscard, Wallasey, Merseyside, CH45 4SJ)
Bob Walker has put sheds of work into *Ledge Of Darkness*, a tribute to the music of Hawkwind. Here, clarity is low and relies on the viewer's imagination being in line with that of Walker and scribe Mike Butterworth. There are constructions of the Kirby level of innovation yet, printed at A6 size, this doesn't improve the poor level of communication.
It angles around so the panels are placed with little sense of universal or shared perception. Or perhaps that perspective is intended. Still, this zine is rooted (however loosely) in an era, amongst contacts of what now makes up the Brit-classic age of comics. Previous issues have reprinted one-page contributions by Bryan Talbot, Smokey Bears, Chester West.
But Windhead's Dogs is just too compact. With my poor eyesight, much of this I can't make out. The most translatable comic strips in this booklet are a series of commentaries on Western and non-Western foreign policy.
The Verdict: Genius alongside incoherence, you're gonna need your own photocopier! (AL)

Have you got a zine or a comic which you think deserves more attention? Send it to: Zine Seen, 45 Fullingdale Road, The Headlands, Northampton NN32PZ and get exposure!



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VERDICT COLLECTED EDITION

Abe – Wrong For All The Right Reasons
Top Shelf Productions
By Glenn Dakin

I first came across Glenn Dakin's thoughtful and lyrical *Abe* strips in the pages of Eddie Campbell's Bacchus Magazine, though I'd seen his *Temptation* and *Robot Crusoe* cartoons before, without knowing anything about the playful, philosophical mind behind them. The strips wandered down curious byways, with little regard for the everyday, restrictive conventions of plot, form or structure. They seemed to have been generated as stream-of-consciousness, and yet they took on an appreciable shape that mingled poetry, painting and memory, or simply playfully urged the reader to Live First, Ask Questions Later.

Abe Rat lives in the far, far future, though it often seems to resemble the present, while Abe himself and the artist seem at times interchangeable. He doesn't fit in to the world around him, but he often dresses up as the superhero Captain Oblivion to save it from evil villains, or perhaps just to paint a building because he feels like it. Abe likes to think peculiar thoughts and wander through the changing seasons. He listens for the sake of listening and prefers having fun to striving for achievement. He wrestles with thorny mental questions about reason and feelings and the soul. He sings songs, writes poetry, travels. He contemplates the world, observing the foibles of the people around him and the beauty of the landscape, and tries to make his own way through life. He sees the world in his own inimitable way, and he generously shares with us his thoughts, his observations and his untrammelled flights of fancy. Lucky us.

I mean it. Dakin uses these strips as a genuine, honest and unselfconscious means of self-expression, which is bloody rare. There's a wealth of meaning and contemplation to be enjoyed here. There's a sense of wonder, but also a sense of life's limitations. "As people get older they feel stupidly guilty about their own inability to live..." Funny, quirky, occasionally sad, always thoughtful, but more importantly thought provoking, Wrong For All The Right Reasons is very beautiful and very special. Read it, then re-read it, then give it to a friend.

The Verdict: A genuinely lovely, poetic and unpretentious book by one of life's dreamers. It's good for the soul and it's a rich and rewarding read. (NQ)

Bericht uit het verleden (L'Étrange Rendez-vous)
Éditions Blake et Mortimer
By Jean Van Hamme and Ted Benoit

So, how do you continue a famous, highly influential series which was solely the work of one creator – and a creator who continually updated his art style and the settings in which he placed his characters? Should you even try? Obviously the people at Blake et Mortimer think so, since this is the third "sequel" to appear in the last seven years.

It's also the most successful one yet.

Van Hamme and Benoit's first attempt, L'Affaire Francis Blake, got off on the wrong foot by doing something Edgar P. Jacobs would never have done - homaging another well-known piece of fiction, Buchan's The Thirty-Nine Steps - and Benoit appeared to be having some difficulty getting Mortimer's face right. Sente and Juilliard's Le Machination Woronov looked much better... but both stories notably lacked the element of the fantastic which always marked Jacobs' work, and what appeared to be a deliberate decision to set the new stories firmly in the 1950s raised certain minor continuity problems.

The latter situation is confirmed in this third album - on page three Van Hamme specifically sets it in 1954, squarely between the events of Le Marque Jaune and L'Enigme Atlantide. Moreover, detailed and explicit reference is made to the events of Le Marque Jaune, and characters from Le Secret de l'Espadon play an important role. Jacobs himself rarely referred to previous stories other than in passing; perhaps Van Hamme is doing it now as an homage to American comics, since this story is the first Blake and Mortimer adventure to be set in the USA. Perhaps it really doesn't matter - except that these are the kind of considerations which will inevitably cause readers to furrow their brows a little.

To make up for that, though, this is not just a routine Cold War thriller like the previous two stories. The science fiction element is fantastic enough to please the most demanding of Jacobs' fans; moreover, Benoit's grip on the art style has improved immensely, losing all the minor shortcomings which spoiled his first attempt. The spirit and style seem broadly right, the story is highly entertaining, so this album can be strongly recommended (albeit with the caveat that if you haven't yet read the originals you should do so first!).

Finally, these three "sequels" have all updated just one thing; each features strong female characters, a shocking novelty given that Jacobs' stories were, as much as Hergé's, completely male dominated. In this case, though, the shock is a pleasant one. If in other respects these albums are deliberate throwbacks, at least they're doing something to redress the misogynistic leanings which pervaded the old Franco-Belgian classics.

The Verdict: Although the sequels will always be ancillary to Jacobs' own work, this is the best of the new Blake et Mortimer albums yet. (MK)

Berlin, City of Stone V. 1
Drawn and Quarterly
By Jason Lutes

Recently I've heard a lot of comics readers talking about waiting for the trade paperback collection rather than buying

the serial pamphlets. I can't help thinking that there's a paradox built into this trend – if everyone followed it, would there be anyone left to buy the serialisation, support the artists while they work and demonstrate that there's enough of a readership to warrant the collection?

Still, a book like this one offers a very good argument for awaiting collections. The eight pamphlets assembled here may each stand alone if taken as fragmented vignettes of people's lives and preoccupations, but read as a whole they amount to a complex, interlinked narrative about how those people change over time, some growing, some diminishing but all changing. Lutes's narrative, framed by the architecture - both famous and insignificant - of 1920s Berlin, traces the threads of several characters' lives as they intersect the city's artistic milieu and its gradually intensifying political landscape, seemingly pursuing their own destinies yet in the end being controlled by the zeitgeist of the city itself. It's an extraordinary achievement: the characters and their lives are what keep you turning the pages in fascination, but ultimately the book is somehow about Berlin itself. The title really does say it all!

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It's also about drawing. One of the principal characters draws almost compulsively, stubbornly following her muse and rejecting the ordered tyranny of the art classes she attends – but the entire approach to characterisation here seems to be a part of Lutes's own fascination with how things look, and how that look can somehow be transcribed into black lines on rich, creamy paper. There's nothing avant-garde about it, nothing difficult, yet there seem to be questions and experiments asked in every line of his work. The reader doesn't have to respond to them, but they enrich marvellously an already enthralling experience.

The Verdict: Berlin isn't a trade paperback. It's a beautiful, tragic, painstakingly accurate *book*! (MK)

Det Tredje Øje
By Ole Comoll Christensen and Niels Søndergaard
Carlsen Denmark

Eight years have elapsed since the second of the *Dimensional Detective* albums appeared, and things have changed; not so much in the story, which follows on from where Den Anden Præsident left off, but in Ole Comoll's art. An interest in more alternative, small press forms has led him into more expressionist areas, as can be seen in his English language collection Excreta, published by Slab-O-Concrete, and while he's returned to his earlier clear line style for the continuation of this series, the figures are more angular, the eyes more expressive, the layouts more solid and less volatile. On the whole I think it's an improvement, although the result is less obviously "mainstream" than in the earlier books.

Otherwise, it's highly entertaining

business as usual. Det Tredje Øje (The Third Eye) places dimension-hopping detective Clement Skunk-Petersen, his assistant Pippi and the alternate Earth Pippi of the previous album in a Copenhagen which is ruled by Nazis but largely controlled by Mafia and Yakuza clans with whom the slightly hapless hero is soon embroiled. Søndergaard's script is fast moving, complex and liberally enlivened with running gags, notably Clement's assumption that his "local" alter ego is also a detective, because people keep addressing him as "Pinkerton" - whereas it eventually turns out that he's a famous opera singer due to play the role of Lt. Pinkerton in a production of Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* (at which the climax of the story takes place). Needless to say, the detective, who stands in for the singer, cannot sing...

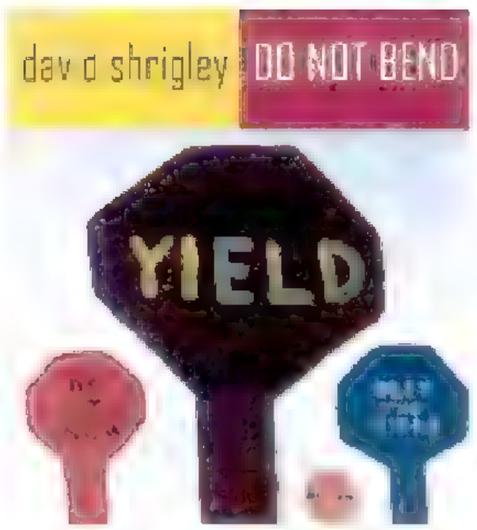
It's a pleasure to see a new episode in this series, especially since its energy and stylishness are unabated. Whether further stories will appear, only time can tell - but for now there's plenty to enjoy and savour here.

The Verdict: The bottle's shape may have changed, but both it and the wine it contains are of fine vintage. (MK)

Do Not Bend
Redstone Press
By David Shrigley

This may be a proper art book, dahhhlings, but that's no reason why it shouldn't be eligible for review in Borderline. It's a zine in everything but Shrigley's pedigree. For those of you scratching your heads by now, David Shrigley is the man who took disaffected textbook doodles and, rather than photocopy them in pamphlets and give them to his friends, put them in art galleries and the Tate Magazine. The effect is at the same time oddly disturbing and a stroke of genius all his own.

Like Lichtenstein before him, what he's doing is nothing the comic book community hasn't seen before; he's simply delivering it to the arts intelligentsia, to whom it's very new, very unusual and terribly fresh. Of course, the fact that it's terribly good at the same time certainly doesn't hurt.



From the splash page (and why shouldn't I call it anything else amongst this crowd) word balloons "We are orchestrating the madness" to the blank 'introduction' that follows it, through Shrigley's perverse wit and dark invitations into the world as he sees it, this oozes with talent and beauty as I smugly sit back and convince myself that only someone educated in art and comics will truly get it.

You may need to venture into a proper bookshop rather than your local "Android's Dungeon" to find a copy, but hey, it'll get you out of the house. Besides, if that sounds too painful, there's always Amazon.

The Verdict: We found this because Amazon told us, "If you like Eightball, you'll also like this." They weren't wrong. (JC)

Fantastic Four – Visionaries: John Byrne
Marvel
By John Byrne

It's become pretty fashionable to Byrne-bash over the last few years, so it's easy to forget the man was once at the top of his profession. This then is a timely reminder that when we talk about the Fantastic Four, we talk about Lee & Kirby... then we talk about John Byrne.

A lot has been written about Byrne's back-to-basics approach, but a few things leap out on re-reading his early FF. By grounding the fantastic in the ordinary in a similar manner to Stephen King or Ray Bradbury, Byrne ensured the Marvel Universe had rarely seemed so real. He also concentrates on the team as individuals, giving equal time to each. There's a rare Johnny Storm solo story here (playing up the difference between adventurers like the FF and actual superheroes) and Byrne developed Susan Richards more in his run than anyone had managed in the previous 20 years. While Reed's intellectual distance is occasionally overplayed as arrogance in these early issues, Byrne always had tragic Ben Grimm down to a tee. There are exciting and engaging subplots, too – from the mystery of Frankie Raye to Reed's bungled attempt to cure The Thing. Not every story succeeds (*The Man With The Power* is a nice idea that fizzles out and is awkwardly forgotten), but it's clear Byrne was interested in pushing forward rather than rehashing old plots and characters. That said, the one certified classic in this collection is the triple-sized 20th Anniversary story, *Terror In A Tiny Town*. One of the best Dr. Doom stories ever told, it comes complete with the sort of twist ending Lee and Kirby used to excel at.

A shame the reprint is so sloppy. Small chunks of text are missing that could easily have been replaced, while the back cover makes reference to a story that isn't even featured in this collection. The rift between Byrne and Marvel means there's no new cover, but is it also the reason why the art hasn't been re-coloured? If Miller and McFarlane could be re-coloured, why doesn't John Byrne deserve the same?

The Verdict: The beginning of the greatest FF run of the last 30 years and a high point in this creator's career. (RH)

9-11 Emergency Relief
Alternative Comics
By Various

This is a collection of cartoons by assorted independent artists and writers relating their experiences of or reaction to the event of that horrible day, September 11. It's a powerful, intimate,

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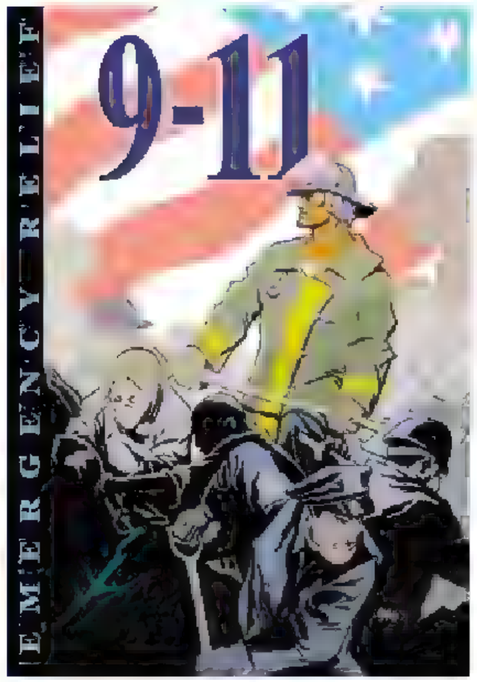


deeply personal collection and impossible to read without being moved. Well-known artists mingle with the more obscure in these pages: Will Eisner, Harvey Pekar, Jeff Smith, James Kochalka, Ted Rall, David Roman, Ashley Wood are just a few of the contributors. There are a lot of names I'd never heard before, and if the only thing this book did was expose people to these exceptional talents, then itwould be worth every penny.

However, it does a lot more.

There are direct eyewitness accounts of the disaster, there are mood pieces and meditations, there are simple stories of how the news affects the artist's surroundings. In *School Daze* by Brian Clopper, the artist, who works as a teacher, has to cope with the terrible news while keeping it from his pupils. *Collapse* by Jenny Gonzalez relates the apocalyptic events occurring around her to her paranoia and psychosis. *Citadel of the Night* by Chris Knowle and K. Thor Jensen tells the story of the prison riots at Attica and the personal and physical scars left by such traumas.

There are all sorts of stories told here in a wide assortment of styles, and it would take a heart of stone not to be touched or moved by them. I confess, though, it was while reading Gregory Benton's *Treasure* in the local park that I had to put the book down and catch my breath and just breathe for a while.

While the Marvel poster-book Heroes was without a doubt a project with its heart in the right place, something about the portrayal of superheroes in the context of real life disaster left a bad taste in my mouth. Emergency Relief does a better job of bringing real humanity to the people coping with the horror. No matter how "cartoony" the style of art, the stories remain honest and real and heartbreaking.

All proceeds from this book go to the American Red Cross

The Verdict: It's a magnificent book and a good cause. Buy it. (NQ)

Powers: Role Play
Image
By Brian Michael Bendis and Michael Avon Oeming

After the mammoth Who Killed Retro Girl? story, Role Play seems a little light by comparison. The mystery seems somewhat by the numbers, and the resolution in particular seems rushed in favour of the ongoing story of Walker and Pilgrim's conflicts with local hood Johnny Royale.

Nevertheless, Powers is still one of Bendis's finest achievements, a police procedural drama with real guts, digging into the practical, often sordid, implications of a world where a small minority possess special powers. The Role Play arc centres on a group of students who dress up as superheroes for vicarious kicks, and the tragic results of their game. It's a concept with numerous psychosexual implications – one victim's girlfriend implies they never had sex, suggesting he got his thrills from his other nocturnal activities – and which allows further investigation of the superhero-related underworld of the Powers universe. Where other writers use superpowers as easy metaphors for puberty or self-empowerment, Bendis goes straight for the dark and dirty stuff others don't dare touch.

The intensity of Bendis's scripting – and yes, the overlapping dialogue is still there in all its balloon intensive goodness – is perfectly contrasted and complemented by Oeming's striking artwork. From the book's Nighthawks-inspired cover to the subtly melancholic final panels, Oeming puts a raw impact and emotional intensity into every fluid line. As Deena Pilgrim makes one (admittedly hilarious) mistake and finds her career on the line, and Walker finds himself increasingly depressed by the role players and their lives, the heavy inks creep further and further into the linework, shadows getting between the lead characters. Oeming's work is the essence of deceptive simplicity; on the surface it seems cruder than the work of other artists, but on closer inspection every detail serves the story, freed from unnecessary embellishments.

Although less relentlessly compelling than its predecessor, this second volume of Powers still represents some of the best comics available. Printed on high quality paper, and with a selection of sketches and rejected covers included for added value, this collection is as close to an essential purchase as you'll find.

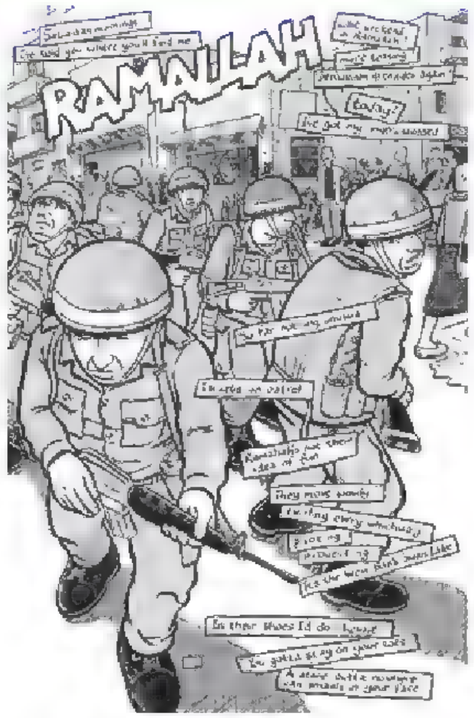
The Verdict: Less substantial than the Retro Girl storyline, the second Powers story arc is nevertheless a witty and thrilling murder mystery with some very serious undercurrents. (MC)

Safe Area Goradze
Fantagraphic Books
By Joe Sacco

Subtitled The War In Eastern Bosnia 1992 - 95, this isn't a history of the war, but rather a look at the lives and stories of the inhabitants of the beleaguered Muslim endave of Goradze in the unreal time between the declaration of the ceasefire and the finalisation of the Dayton Peace Accords. Joe Sacco, a journalist and cartoonist, travelled four times to Gorazde, and this is a record of what he saw and heard on those trips. It's an extraordinary comic and a masterful piece of reportage.

Sacco has an amazing eye for detail, and his pictures of an urban landscape mauled by war and crowded with victims and survivors are utterly captivating. They have a vivid immediacy that is often quite shocking in its depth. It's the people, though, who are the most entrancing. There isn't a single face anywhere in this book, not even in the most crowded scene, that does not have its own personality, that doesn't have its own history, even if it remains untold. Oddly, it's Sacco himself who is portrayed as a slightly unreal, cartoony figure as he trails around after translators and guides, befriends the locals and records their stories, their hopes, their thoughts on the past and the future.

Many of the stories are harrowing,



bloody and violent. The war literally turned neighbour against neighbour, friend against friend. The most appalling atrocities were committed, the worse mass killings since the second world war. People were brutalized, raped, robbed and murdered. The sniping, the shelling, the massacres: it's a catalogue of horrors which should make the book grim reading indeed. But the inhabitants of Goradze, though scarred by their suffering, still manage to be friendly, hospitable and good natured, with an overwhelming desire for life to return to normal as soon as possible. Sacco's affection for the individuals he meets raises the book from the horrible mire of modern history and becomes a lopsided celebration of human perseverance.

The Verdict: Safe Area Goradze is, without a doubt, a modern master-piece of the comic form. (NQ)

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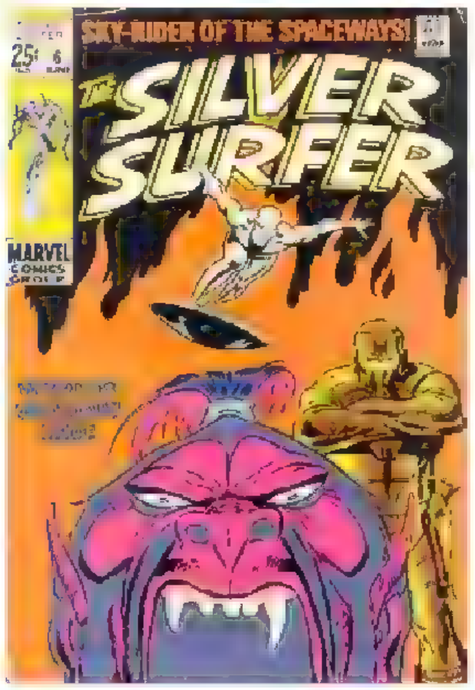
MIRACLES & WONDER

Ian Salmon looks back to the days when a "classic" comic was...

The Shining Sentinel Of The Spaceways

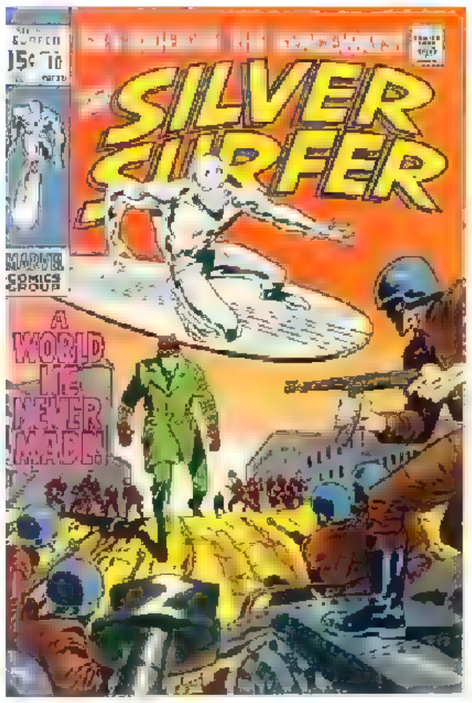
EXCELSIOR!

Let us commence, true believers, in the grand style of Mr Stanley Martin Lieberman of the glittering city that our race styles New York; there is a flaw, a darkness, a secret so profoundly wrong at the heart of the greatest hero that Marvel has ever produced that it is a wonder indeed that no other spectator, none but myself, has ever noticed its glowering, threatening presence, nor observed the weakness that strikes at the heart of the best, the most prized, the most glittering, most selfless, purest soul of Marveldom's



massed miracles.

Sod that. Can you believe that Stan Lee actually kept that up over about a trillion books a month for the vast majority of the 60s? From this point on I'll return to my less fevered but no less purple style and attempt to pinpoint exactly why the Silver Surfer (somewhat like Elvis) has never been as great as he should have been. Cast your mind back, mere months to start with; we are nearing the end of Carlos Pacheco's initially promising but ultimately flawed run on **Fantastic Four** (flawed, since you ask, by a lack of coherent plotting, Jeph Loeb being forced in his scripts to explain bizarre leaps of logic between panels). Marvel's cosmic forces are amassing against the galaxy- and Galactus-destroying powers of Abraxas (never trust a villain who shares his name with a Santana album). In the first wave of battle the Silver Surfer is destroyed, literally melted. And you know what? No one cared. The outcry was almost deafening in its silence, the number of people who threatened to boycott every Marvel title unless the Surfer was brought back was exactly nil. Now, obviously, one major factor of this was that we knew he wouldn't stay dead - Marvel's heroes never do, the licensing deals are far too persuasive for that - but you have to add to this that nobody actually gave a damn



about the character any longer.

It wasn't always this way. Once the big glittery guy on the flying piece of balsa was sacrosanct. The only person at Marvel allowed to write him was Stan himself; only the hottest artists could come within a brushstroke of his shiny little form. In the period that we have come to realise as "post Stan" this changed. And it changed big style.

The watershed was the revival of the character's solo title under the control of Steve Englehart - the first issue may not have stunk as badly as Todd McFarlane's first **Spider-Man** but it was pretty damn close in the "I'd rip this up if I hadn't paid for it" stakes. And suddenly it was open season, the Surfer was just another character. Those of us who still cared, mourned. Because once he had been special, he had been more, he had been the defining highpoint of comics as a serious art form. The Silver Surfer was our grand statement. He was the icon that we could point at saying "Look, they're not just for kids."

Except we were wrong.

Viewed at a remove of thirty years The Silver Surfer (the comic, not the character - important distinction) seems an embarrassing remnant of a long lost counter culture.

In terms of style the title is the moment when Stan realised that students were "hip to his lingo" and started to write to them rather than allow them to gravitate to his own work, allowing him the opportunity to make his grand statement on the state of the world rather than entertain. This was Stan's shot at Shakespeare - forgetting that if Shakespeare was one thing it was an entertainer. So we have one of the most verbose, over written characters in the history of comics, an endless source of exposition, a character that refers to itself endlessly, descriptively in the third person - the result of Lee's terrible scripting, an obvious attempt to jump on the hippy/alternative bandwagon.

We also have the purest example of the Marvel house style - the endless exposition is absolutely necessary to illuminate the obviously bare bones of plot delivered to John Buscema. What follows are sequences of grand guignol orated in the manner of Donald Sinden playing Hamlet. And we'll return to that momentarily. The art is fine, in Buscema's usual solid, muscular style. But the writing is almost uniformly awful Hamlet. Said we'd get back to him. This is obviously Stan's shot at the Bard's finest creation; the sense of the doomed tragedian, is in every line but the only aspect of Hamlet that is achieved is his inconsistency. The Surfer is almost entirely self contradictory - claimed as the purest soul of all (by no less a figure than Mephisto himself - the Marvel Universe equivalent of Satan). There is *no* evidence for this, whatsoever; all we get is endless petulance and self pity. He rails against all humanity and all of its many ills without ever representing an alternative. The perfect hippy icon.

So what is the imperfection at the heart of the Surfer?

Is it the fact that in issue #1 he states in one panel that he cannot lead Galactus to a planet of simple creatures as even they deserve a life of some sort and in the next panel takes his master to the teeming populace of Earth, avoiding ooh, Mars, Uranus, Venus etc., thus negating the whole point of the character in one of the most contradictory origin issues of all time?

No. It's this: The Silver Surfer is possibly the greatest character ever created by Marvel. His essence stands as purity itself, we embrace him, we believe in him. It's just that nobody has *ever* written him in a satisfactory manner.

Cat. Amongst. Pigeons. BL

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YOUNG GUNS

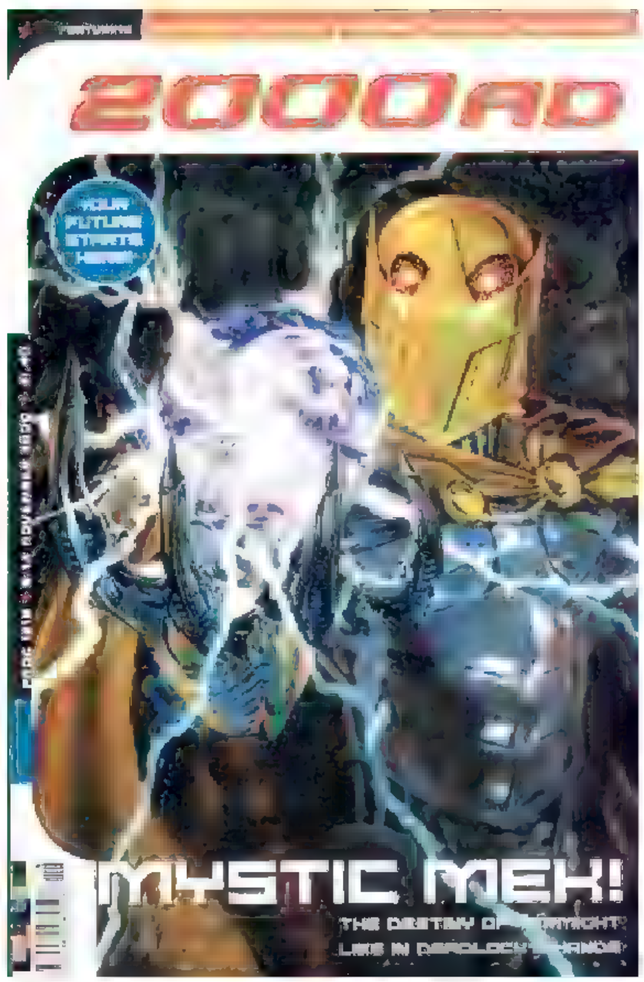
It's not age but talent that determines tomorrow's stars today, this month: John Charles

THESE days I'm John Charles, having dropped my surname on artistic endeavours a few years ago. Those of you with long memories may have heard of John Mould, I'm him too. I'm 41 and finally making a living as an artist.

A brief history of my flirtations with comics...

When I was about 18 I turned up unannounced at Kings Reach Tower to try and get into 2000AD. Robin Smith looked over my stuff and suggested I go to art school. He was right of course. By the way, just turning up is frowned upon - I wouldn't advise it.

Workin' Klass Super Hero - the fanzine which featured Glenn Fabry's first published strip, and mine! Honourable mentions to Steve Brown, Kev Pike, Barry May and Martin Constable. Way back in 1978/9, that was. We occasionally discuss doing issue 3, but never actually do. Glenn drew me into an episode of *Slaine* - my 2000AD debut! Toxic - I was graphic designer there for a while. Marvel UK - Knights of Pendragon #13 - pencils (and a couple of other things, best forgotten). Thanks to John Freeman for teaching me about storytelling and leaving space for lettering - oops! I then worked for a few years as a graphic designer. I eventually quit my job to get some samples together, hoping to combine computer skills with drawing and painting to produce better images than I could create by hand.



So, off to UKCAC at Manchester with a few cover art samples. I managed to get my Transmetropolitan piece in front of then editor Stuart Moore - he seemed irritated by my attempts to get his reaction to it. (A few years later DC cover editor Mark Chiarello expressed an interest in it - still no sale, I'm afraid.)

David Bishop kindly looked at my stuff. He liked the Transmetropolitan cover and suggested I could do something for 2000AD as a commission. I sent him a few cover ideas and he didn't like any of them. After a second wave of sketches he commissioned me to draw the cover for 2000 AD Prog 1102. I've since drawn four more covers (see the 2000AD website) a *Pulp Sci-Fi* and two *Future Shocks* (Progs 1230, 1272 and one coming soon). Two of these were written by Mike (Lucifer) Carey, who I knew before he gained his middle name.

The first Bristol Con... I met writer Kevin Gunstone in a queue to see Scott Dunbier. Kev had made inroads at Antarctic Press, and I designed his Warrior Nun Brigantia for him. Interior art was by Art Wetherell - I just did the covers. I've never seen issue 3 printed. I'm told that the printing sucked, so maybe it's just as well. I also worked on Tomorrow Man with Kev. Issue one's cover was

commissioned late, so it missed *Previews*. Sales sucked so 2 & 3 never happened. I'd already done the covers too.

Last year I attended the San Diego Con and saw Brigantia 2 on sale in US comic shops. Jm Lee (really!) gave me a lift to my hotel, I shook Neal Adams by the hand, and I stood three feet away from Will Eisner.

Aside from folk already mentioned I'd like to thank a few people for their good offices along the way, so cheers to Dan Abnett, Martin Griffiths, Frank Plowright, Kev F. Sutherland, Andy Diggle, Frazer Irving,

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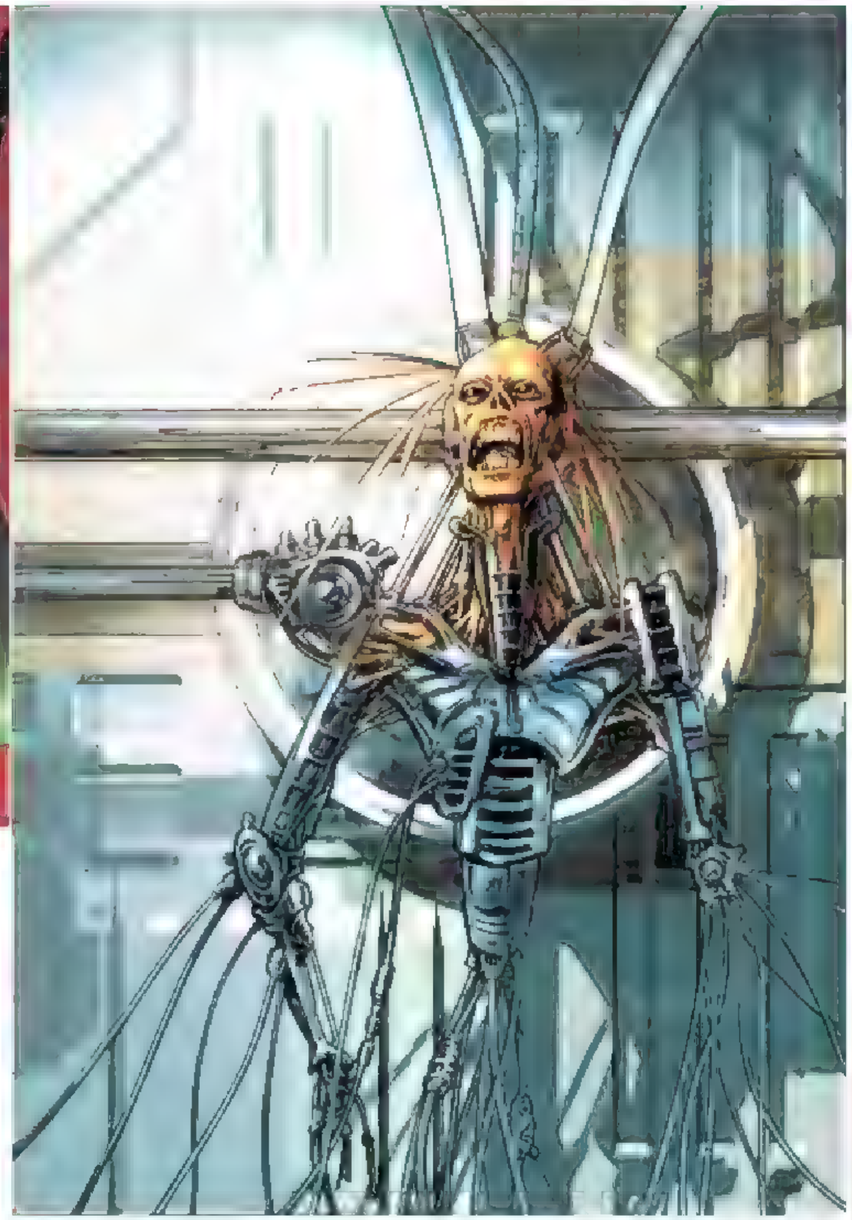

Duncan Fegredo, Dave Windett, Liam Sharpe, Karen and Colin McNeil and anyone else who knows me!

The future? Three more Brigantia covers, one of which is previewed here. I designed the logo too - cool no? Hopefully more work for 2000AD soon. I'd like to get a few more covers as I think I'm stronger on single image stuff, but I'm also co-writing a story with Kev Gunstone that I hope to get to draw if we can blag the new editors into wanting it. I'm constantly experimenting with art styles and this will be no exception if it comes off. I'd like to get more loose and arty. If you want to see more check out *http://freespace.virgin.net/jcharles.art*

I may go away sometimes, but I come back stronger.

Artwork previous page: Published cover for 2000AD and unpublished Tomorrow Man cover. This page: Warrior Nun Brigantia cover, a personal favourite called Painborg, a mock up of a Transmetropolitan cover and an homage/ inspired-by-Jack-Kirby picture of a god.

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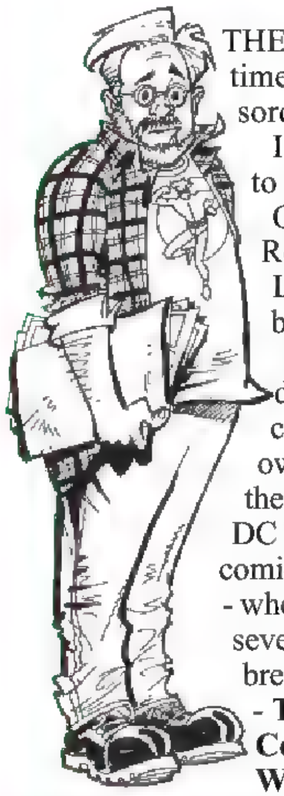
DRAWING BOARD

Secrets from the Artist's portfolio: Mike Collins



THE truth… it's time to face the sordid truth…

I sold my soul to Stan Lee.

Oh, and Gene Roddenberry…

Let's backtrack…

1968(-ish) I drew my first comic - my own version of the short-lived DC Thompson comic **The Sparky** - when I was about seven. I lived and breathed comics - **TV21**, **Countdown**, **Whizzer and Chips**, **Beezer** and the rest.

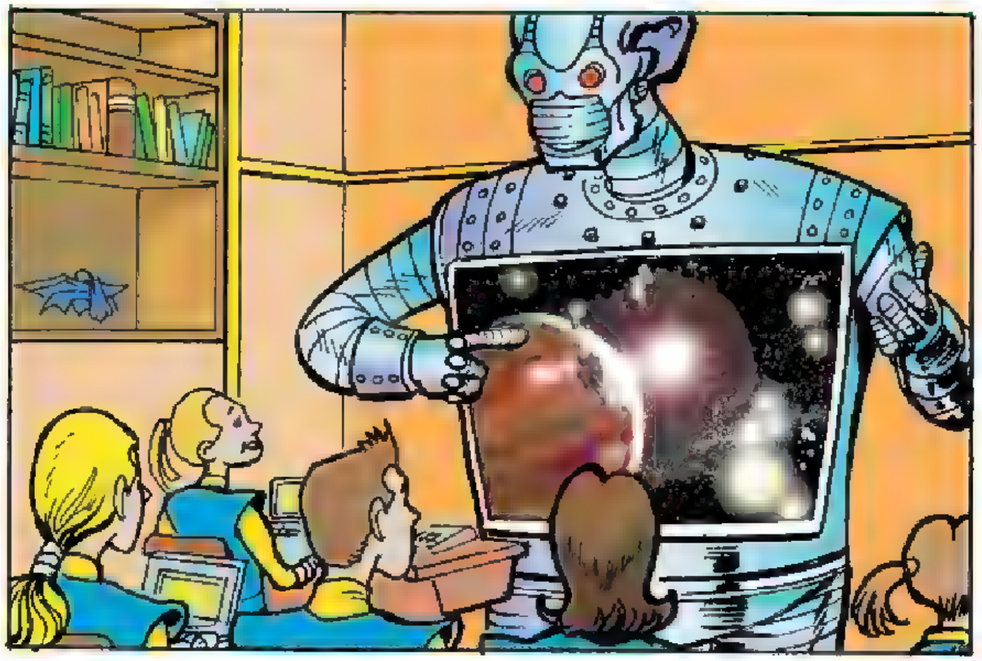
I declared to my parents that *this* was what I wanted to do.

But not as a job, I was kindly told… no one did it as a *job*… and, anyway I was from West Bromwich, one of those places where no one does anything (when I found out John Byrne was a fellow Baggie, I was amazed).

I didn't discover Marvel properly until the arrival of British Marvel in the early 70s, and American comics with the purchase of **Captain Marvel#25**… but then I was hooked. I was Stan's. My comic strips went from humour to superheroes, almost overnight.

John Buscema, Jim Starlin, Gil Kane, Howard Chaykin and Frank Brunner became my new artistic heroes. Kirby came later - strangely, it was Kirby's DC stuff, particularly **Omac**, which hooked me.

When I went to college, I met and teamed up with Mark Farmer. We went from fan artists to pro over the course of a couple of years, helped by Alan Moore, who recommended us to Marvel UK to draw his Frank Miller parody, **Dourdevil, the Man Without A Sense of Humour** after he'd scripted the last episode of our fan strip **Moonstone**. Mark and I worked together successfully for several years – highlights being **Laser Eraser and Pressbutton** with Pedro Henry for Eclipse, *Slaine* for **2000AD** and *The Cherubim* for **Captain Britain**, until Dave Gibbons wooed Mark away with the promise of cheap nylons and Yankee glitter…



I settled into writing and/or drawing various licensed strips for Marvel UK- primarily **Transformers** (Marvel's reasoning being that as Mark and I were doing the Ladybird Books, I already had the toys lying around to draw from). **Doctor Who** and various other toy-based lines followed to fill the time…

Regular gigs on the *Judge Dredd* newspaper strip and fill-in work at DC followed for the next few years, until I got to draw a couple of issues of the **X-Men** (including the first **Gambit**, **#266**). So I was serving my one dark lord, Stan… what about Gene?

DC hired me to write and draw some Trek stuff set between the movies. This led to writing and drawing **Peter Cannon-Thunderbolt**, where I had fun playing with comic book clichés, followed by a long run on **Darkstars**, DC's 'tougher' **Green Lantern Corps**.

About this point (chronology's not one of my most keenly honed skills), I started sharing studio space with fellow Cardiff based artists David Roach and Dylan Teague. Dave and I worked on the **Babylon 5** comic mini-series with JMS and Peter David, and at the same time I worked at Marvel on **Star Trek** with Dan Abnett & Ian Edginton, and Glenn Greenberg. Here I was, serving my twin gods Stan and Gene! Unfortunately, Marvel gave up the license, so several projects - about two years work in the pipeline - got canned.

I suddenly found myself unemployed: I'd been working continuously for about a dozen years and suddenly there was nothing. I'd spent too long on one thing - I needed to diversify. After a rough time I found myself doing storyboard and design

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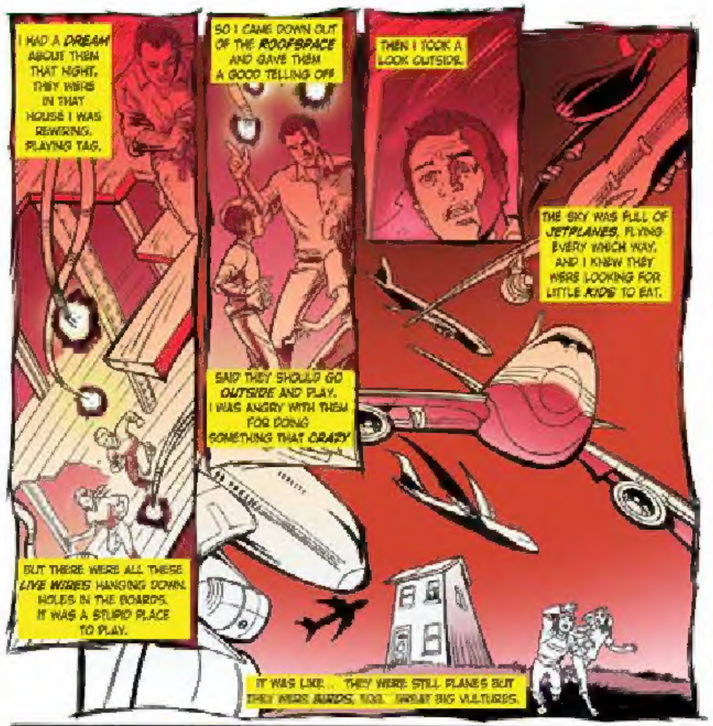
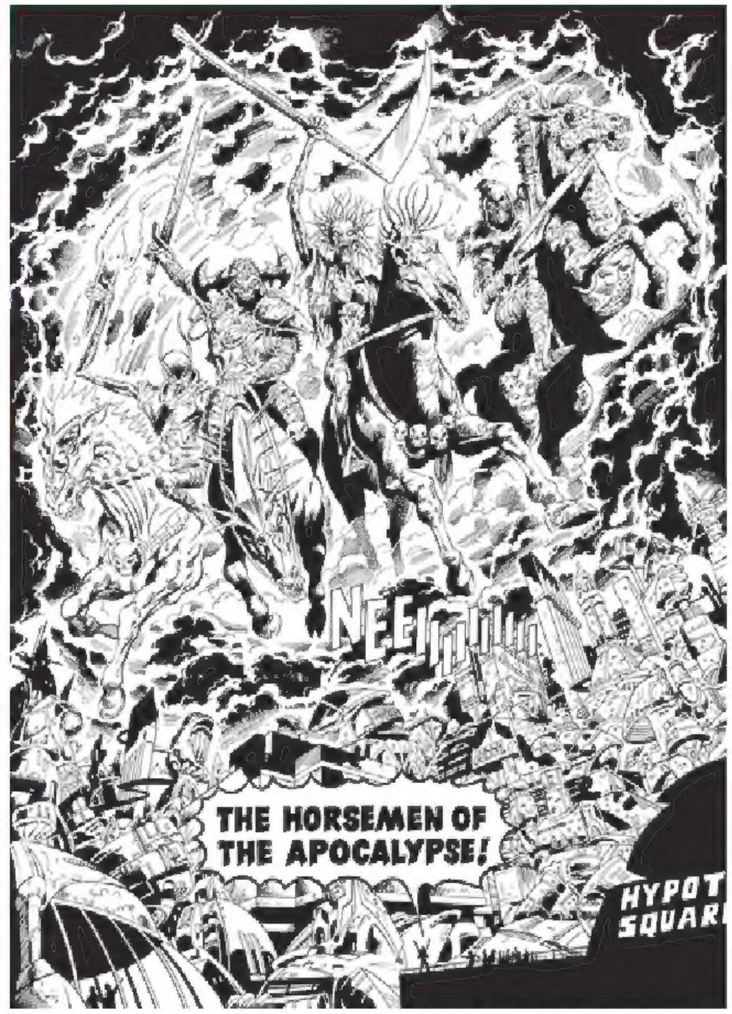
work for animation; illustrations for Wizards of the Coast; art for educational comics, usually published in a foreign language.

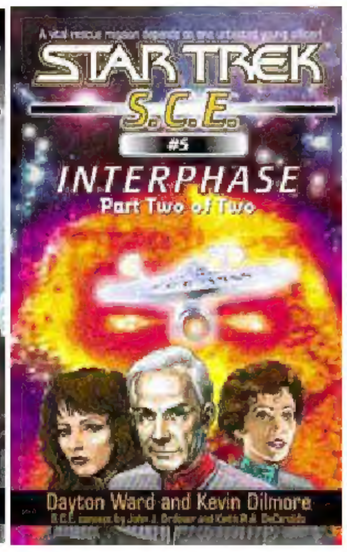
Comics work turns up in fits and starts now… A further Trek graphic novel - Peter David's **New Frontier** (with Dave inking again) - has led to a regular gig illustrating e-book covers for Pocket Books Trek novels; I do magazine illustrations for SFX amongst others; I illustrate **Harry Potter** trading cards for Wizards of the Coast. I'm currently writing and laying out a massive graphic novel adaptation of a Welsh language animated movie.

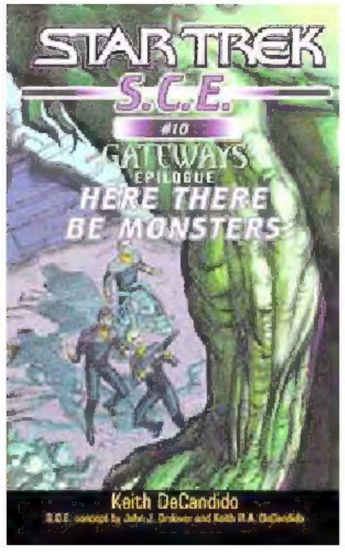
But it's not really what you'd call a *job*... ***Mike Collins***


I HAD A DREAM ABOUT THEM THAT NIGHT. THEY WERE IN THAT HOUSE I WAS REMIXING. PLAYING TAG.
SO I CAME DOWN OUT OF THE ROOFSPACE AND GAVE THEM A GOOD TELLING OFF.
THEN I TOOK A LOOK OUTSIDE.
THE SKY WAS FULL OF JETPLANES, FLYING EVERY WHICH WAY, AND I KNEW THEY WERE LOOKING FOR LITTLE KIDS TO EAT.
SAID THEY SHOULD GO OUTSIDE AND PLAY. I WAS ANGRY WITH THEM FOR DOING SOMETHING THAT CRAZY.
BUT THERE WERE ALL THESE LIVE WIRES HANGING DOWN. HOLES IN THE BOARDS. IT WAS A STUPID PLACE TO PLAY.
IT WAS LIKE... THEY WERE STILL PLANES BUT THEY WERE BIRDS, TOO. GREAT BIG VULTURES.
THREE AM, I'M SITTING THERE THINKING. HOW CAN I LOOK AFTER THEM IF I'M NOT EVEN HERE?
THE BAGS WERE RIGHT THERE WHERE I'D LEFT THEM. MY MESSAGE TO FRIDA.
BUT THEN, HOW CAN I LOOK AFTER THEM IF I AM HERE?
LOOK, YOU BETRAYED ME, AND THIS IS WHERE IT GOT YOU.
NOTHING WE CAN DO. NOTHING AT ALL.
WE CAN LOVE EACH OTHER.
YES THERE IS.
STUFF... STUFF CAN JUST COME DOWN OUT OF A CLEAR SKY. THERE'S NOTHING YOU CAN DO.
YOU DON'T GET TO BETRAY ME TWICE.



The Diversity of Mike Collins - from Star Trek to Dredd with Oxford University Press thrown in!





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STAN LEE HAS NOT YET BEEN TOLD ABOUT...
GRIT!
FEATURING - DOUBLEVIL
THE MAN WITHOUT A SENSE OF HUMOUR
I SMELL EXPENSIVE PERFUME...
I'M STANDING ON SOME SORT OF FUR RUG. THERE'S MUSIC...
I MUST BE IN THE PLAYBOY MANSION!

A selection of Mike Collins: From Marvel UK in the '80s to Wizards of the Coast to Harry Potter trading cards – Mike Collins has been there. done it and probably designed the T-shirt! This page shows his work from the early 80s up to one of Mike's most recent gigs!

I DON'T NEED THIS SMALL-TIME STUFF ANYMORE. WITH WHAT I'VE GOT THERE'S A WORLD OF POSSIBILITIES...
WE COULD GROW STRONGER, HARDER!
AN ARMY OF WARPIES ANSWERABLE ONLY TO ME!
LEX CHRISTIAN!

BIG PEOPLE GO 'WAY!
HEY! THE TOYS ARE ALIVE! I DIDN'T KNOW LUMP COULD DO THAT!
NEITHER DID HE! BUT, INSTEAD OF JUST CREATING AN IMAGE, HE'S MAKING THE BIG PEOPLE'S NIGHTMARES REALLY HAPPEN!
BL

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WORLD OF HEROS

Chris Spicer & Rebecca Bonser's made up comics news...

"Nuff Said" Month Considered Success – Marvel claims massive saving on unpaid letterers' fees.

Bill Jemas is big fat liar

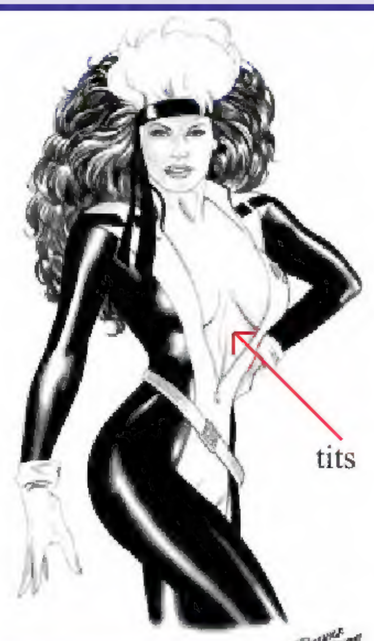
FOLLOWING his recent admission that he lied to promote the launch of a new title, Bill Jemas has announced that Marvel will lie in all of their press releases from now on.

The lies, told during the launch of Alias, the detective / superhero / anal sex title spearheading (pardon the expression) the launch of Marvel's MAX line of "adult comics", concerned a scene in the first issue where the title's heroine was seen having sex with '70s character Luke Cage. At the time, Jemas announced that the scene had so shocked a worker at the Alabama factory printing the title that they had refused to produce any more copies. Jemas later admitted that this had been a fabrication, a fact later confirmed to us by workers at the printers in question, who told us that they'd refused to print the comic because it was "crap".

However, it seems that Jemas has since got a taste for lying, and aims to use it to create more scandalous media coverage of other Marvel titles. We asked Jemas which of Marvel's latest Advance Listings were untrue. "Oh, none of them." said Jemas, smiling strangely. Disappointment has already been expressed by fans looking forward to the "Zombie Karen Page" issue of Daredevil, the Hulk "Winning Lottery Ticket Special" and the Rogue "Marathon Tits-Out Session" one-shot.

An insider at Marvel told us: "He lies all the time these days – barely a word comes out of his mouth that isn't a load of shite."

Jemas later told us that he believed *World of Heros* to be a "sterling publication, quite possibly the best comics related column ever – if not the best thing to do with comics ever in the whole world."



Dark Horse Makes Big Announcement – when questioned, shamefacedly admits it's another Star Wars comic.

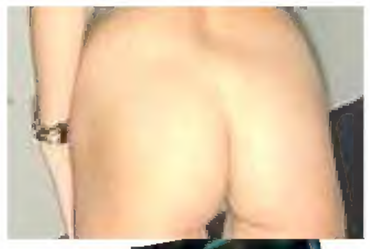
Comics Creators go to their own aid

Following an outbreak of mystery illnesses amongst some of the comics industry's top names, creators have clubbed together to set up a new charity to help pay for the medical care of comic writers and artists.

The charity, the *Fund for Unwell Comics Creators and their Eventual Rehabilitation into Society*, has been set up by a joint effort between Chris Claremont and John Byrne. Regular readers of *World Of Heros* will know that Claremont recently lost the ability to talk or write, having used up all of his words creating dialogue-heavy melodrama over a period of decades.

Those who read *World Of Heros* in its pre-Borderline incarnation as a news website will remember that John Byrne himself was the victim of a shocking mystery illness when he caught sight of his own reflection and turned to stone. Despite offers by movie studios to star in remakes of *The Rock*, *Romancing The Stone* and the next Indiana Jones film (with Harrison Ford fleeing, terrified, as Byrne rolls down a tunnel towards him), Byrne has opted to try and find a cure for his strange condition.

Pledges from comics fans have already flooded in thick and fast via the fund's website, as have pleas from creators in need of medical aid. Readers of Paul Jenkins' run on Spider-Man have already pledged enough money to afford the sense of humour transplant that he's needed so desperately for so long, while readers of New X-Men have pleaded with the fund to pay for an emergency operation to remove Grant Morrison's head from his ass. Rob Liefield has dropped his plea for a hand and eye transplant after receiving only a single pledge by a fan who later asked for his money back, claiming to have clicked on the donate button by mistake.



artists impression of Grant's head entering his arse

We talked to the creators behind the scheme. Chris Claremont, in a typed statement, told us "We think it's important to ensure the continued health of people who provide entertainment to millions on a monthly basis with no thought of themselves other than their huge pay packets. Ook." We tried to get a statement from Byrne, but unfortunately he was unable to talk as a pigeon was nesting in his mouth.

Frank Miller takes vacation

Following his recent work on **The Dark Knight Strikes Again**, Frank Miller has announced to the comics world that he is going to be taking a long vacation.

The announcement, made during an online chat with fans, bought shrieks of approval from the past-it creator's hysterical groupies. Miller will apparently be taking a trip to Former Glories, a small island in the South Pacific, and will be travelling with Undeserved Reputation airlines. I'm sure we all wish Miller a safe journey and a pleasant holiday, and hope he doesn't come back soon.

Frank Miller looking incredibly like Mark Hollis from the '80s pop band Talk Talk

Manga publisher to sue Marvel over marmoset porn video

story page 5

Spoof Comics News Column Manages To Get In Another Mention Of Marmosets – Borderline editor foams at mouth.

Please note these are no pictures on this side of the page because there were too many on this side last month

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HOLD THE BACK PAGE

HERE'S A WEIRD ONE...

Where does this come from? Three years ago this picture turned up claiming to be a scene from a cgi comicbook featuring Lockheed the alien dragon from Marvel's X-books. Marvel's then boss Bob Harras denied it. Six months later... amazingly... this turned up on a cgi porn site... Go figure!

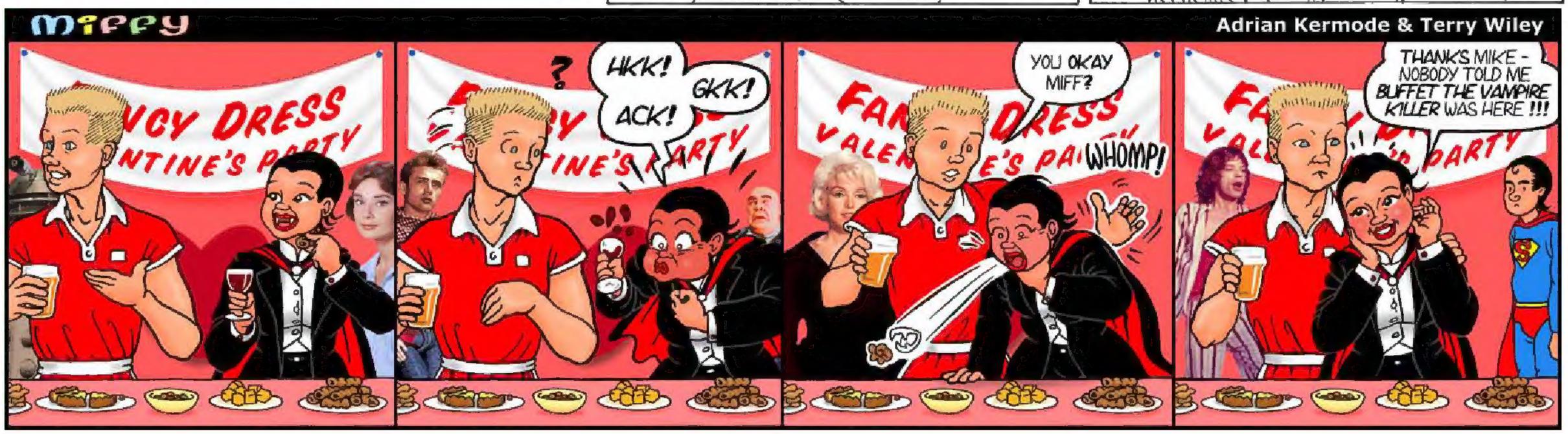
Mark Waid, Borderline & the Aria Review from issue #6 - a statement

WE would like to apologise for any offence caused by a reference in the **Aria** review printed in our last issue. We have now been reliably informed that Devin Grayson (left) doesn't have a grip on Mark Waid's (top left) bollocks after all, and are sorry if we caused any misconceptions by suggesting that she did.

JOHN RICHSTONE'S
COMICS 2K5
PLEASE BE AWARE THAT THE FOLLOWING COLUMN IS BASED ON RUMOUR AND SPECULATION AND MAY NOT BE TRUE...
ALTHOUGH IT PROBABLY IS...
MEANING IT ISN'T...
I'M ONLY SAYING THIS FOR LEGAL REASONS...
OR MADE UP...
SO IT'S TRUE...
DC DELAY FINAL ISSUE OF THE AUTHORITY!
SUPERMAN
AND ALL THIS AFTER DC RECENTLY PUBLISHED A SUPERMAN STORY WHERE HE ACCIDENTLY HAS SEX WITH THE INVISIBLE MAN DURING A LOVE SCENE WITH WONDER WOMAN!
IT'S BEEN 40 YEARS, AND DC STILL HAVEN'T PUBLISHED THE FINAL ISSUE OF MARK MILLAR'S RUN ON THE AUTHORITY! DC SAY IT'S BECAUSE FRANK QUITELY BUGGERED OFF TO MARVEL...
UH UH UH
...BUT I KNOW IT'S BECAUSE THEY HATE GAYS!!

"GRANT MORRISON AND ALAN MOORE CONTINUE TO WRITE SOME OF THE BEST COMICS PUBLISHED TODAY, BUT DID YOU KNOW THAT THE TWO WRITERS HAVE BEEN WAGING A WITCH-WAR IN PHYCHIC-SPACE FOR THE LAST FIFTY YEARS?"

2000AD STILL REFUSES TO CHANGE IT'S NAME TO 3000AD!
THIS IS BECAUSE 2000AD IS A RECOGNISED BRAND NAME.
THIS IS DESPITE SALES BEING AS LOW AS SEVEN AND IT ONLY EVER HAVING SPAWNED TWO MOVIES SINCE IT BEGAN SIXTY THREE YEARS AGO! AND ONE OF THOSE WAS HARDWARE!
AND STILL ON 2000AD
ZARJAZ NEWS, EARTHLETS! I HAVE SUCCESFULLY CLONED DAN ABNET! THIS MEANS THAT THE POPULAR SCRIPT DROID WILL BE WRITING TWICE AS MUCH AS BEFORE!
YEAH, ZARJAZ...
GUESS WHAT! I SUCESSFULLY SOLD A PAINTING CALLED 'KNOB' TO AN OLD MAN IN A WHEEL CHAIR!
IF YOU SEE THIS MAN, GIVE HIM 50P AND ASK TO SEE JOHN RICHSTONE'S LATEST PIECE! REMEMBER TO ASK FOR IT BY NAME!
THIS HAS A RUMOUR VALUE OF, I DON'T KNOW... A MILLION!



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